

BEYOND THE PALE: WHITENESS AS INNOCENCE IN  
EDUCATION

A Thesis Submitted to the College of  
Graduate Studies and Research  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Education  
In the Department of Educational Foundations  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

Teachers play a pivotal role in the production of discourse on race relations in education, yet few studies have researched the impact of white teacher identity construction as a variable in the creation and maintenance of racial ideologies, particularly here in Canada. The majority of the current research done on racism in schools has produced data that points to the widespread denial of racism by the majority of white teachers and students, while parents, teachers and students of color acknowledge the pervasive role racism plays in their educational and social lives. While the focus on institutional and systemic racism is important, it sometimes denies the role individuals play in the reproduction of racism and in our ability to make change. For these reasons, it is critical to consider the identity constructions of white teachers, as these constructions will influence how we interpret and respond to existing racial inequalities in education.

This research will draw from poststructural theories of discourse analysis in order to analyze how white teacher identity constructions of ‘innocence’ are reproduced in an education system where racial inequalities are pervasive and systemic. Discourse analysis and deconstruction are important in understanding the way our subjectivity as white teachers continues to be produced and maintained.

This study takes place in the Prairie region, where Aboriginal people have been produced as the racial Other historically. Using an open-ended questionnaire, in-service, and focus group method, this research study invites educators to narrate their own perceptions of racism in schools. The collection and analysis of this data begins to address the theoretical gap in academic knowledge on teacher perceptions of racism in education.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I respectfully and gratefully acknowledge the expert guidance, wisdom, friendship and support of my thesis advisor, Dr. Verna St. Denis. Verna's gentle spirit, generosity and patience will never be forgotten. I would also like to acknowledge the advice and encouragement of my committee members, Dr. Evelyn Peters and Dr. Howard Woodhouse. I very much appreciate the guidance and time that these faculty members have offered in order to help me complete this study. Finally, I would like to thank my research partner Tyler McCreary for the insights, friendship, and laughter he brought to this research study.

My gratitude is extended to the administration of the participant schools and to the teacher participants for their cooperation and trust. Their contributions to this project are highly valued and appreciated.

I would also like to acknowledge the patience and understanding of my family and friends who have offered encouragement and support throughout the process of completing this study.

This thesis is dedicated to my two beautiful daughters, Morgan (Brynnie) and Devan (Bird) who have taken every step towards anti-racism with me. I am so proud of you both.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

PERMISSION TO USE.....	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	iv
CHAPTER ONE: .....	1
Introduction and Rationale.....	1
<i>Organization of the Thesis</i> .....	5
CHAPTER TWO:.....	6
A Review of the Related Literature.....	6
<i>Poststructural Theory of Discourse Analysis and Identity Construction</i> .....	6
<i>Critical Race Theory</i> .....	10
<i>The Significance of White Teacher Identity Constructions in Education</i> .....	14
CHAPTER THREE:.....	23
Research Methodology .....	23
<i>Kailin's Research Study</i> .....	23
<i>Rationale for Research in Saskatchewan</i> .....	26
<i>School Context and Setting</i> .....	28
<i>Questionnaire Data Collection</i> .....	30
<i>Presentation of the questionnaire data.</i> .....	31
<i>Data Coding</i> .....	32
<i>Discourse Analysis</i> .....	33
<i>Focus Group Data Collection</i> .....	34
CHAPTER FOUR: .....	38
Data Analysis: The Race to Innocence.....	38
<i>Individual Forms of Racism</i> .....	39
<i>Student to Student Incidents of Racism</i> .....	42
<i>Response to student incidence of racism.</i> .....	46
<i>Playing the Race Card</i> .....	49
<i>Telling on Each Other</i> .....	53
<i>Teacher response to racism from colleagues.</i> .....	54
<i>Impact of Teacher Perceptions of Racism</i> .....	55
CHAPTER FIVE: .....	59
Focus Group Analysis: Turning the Gaze .....	59
<i>Barriers to Anti-Racist Educational Theory and Practice</i> .....	61
<i>Impact of teacher identity constructions.</i> .....	64
<i>Protecting white privilege.</i> .....	65

<i>White privilege and white guilt.</i>	66
<i>The production of the other.</i>	69
<i>The construction of sameness versus difference.</i>	71
<i>Cultural determinism versus racism.</i>	73
<i>The culture of poverty.</i>	76
<i>The shame of poverty.</i>	77
<i>National discourse as choice.</i>	79
<b><i>Imagining and Negotiating Change in Educational Theory and Practice</i></b>	80
<i>Beginning with dialogue: The relevance for schools.</i>	82
<i>Getting involved in anti-racist education.</i>	84
<i>Examining white privilege.</i>	85
<i>Validating a history of oppression.</i>	86
<i>Hegemonic constructions of success.</i>	88
<i>Challenging the structure of the system.</i>	90
<i>Does anti-racism change your perceptions of education?</i>	92
<b>CHAPTER SIX:</b>	95
Conclusions and Implications	95
Implications of Anti-racist Education	96
Barriers to Anti-Racist Education	98
Resisting Whiteness	102
References	107
<b>APPENDIX A</b>	115
Application for Approval of Research Protocol	115
<b>APPENDIX B</b>	116
Certificate of Approval	116
<b>APPENDIX C</b>	117
Letter of Participant Consent	117
<b>APPENDIX D</b>	118
Focus Group Consent Form	118
<b>APPENDIX E</b>	119
Questionnaire	119
<b>APPENDIX F</b>	120
Initial Focus Group Questions	120

*In a fractured age, when cynicism is god, here is a possible heresy: we live by stories, we also live in them. One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted – knowingly or unknowingly – in ourselves. We live stories that either give our lives meaning or negate it with meaninglessness. If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives.*

*Ben Okri (1997)*





## **CHAPTER ONE:**

### **Introduction and Rationale**

Racializing practices are an integral part of the formation and continuing development of institutions in Canada, including our education system. There have been numerous studies which reveal racist patterns in social relations, practices and structures which operate against less powerful racial groups in Canada (Castagna & Dei, 2000; Henry, Tator, Mattis & Rees, 1995; Razack, 2001; Willinsky, 1998). These patterns are reinforced by discourses that defend the status quo and portray the racialized Other in stereotypical and demeaning ways (hooks, 1992; Morrison, 1992; Wetherell & Potter, 1992; Wilmot, 2005).

Yet there is much denial about racism in Canada (Lund, 2006). As Canadian legal scholar Constance Backhouse (1999) states, “The ideology of ‘racelessness’ is a hallmark of Canadian tradition, which is in keeping with a national mythology that Canada is not a racist country” (p.14). This ideology allows average citizens to position themselves outside of racist social structures, fostering the belief that, as individuals, we are not responsible for the racial inequalities that exist within Canada. This Canadian myth of ‘racelessness’ reinforces the belief that our school systems are race neutral places, despite evidence to the contrary (Carr & Klassen, 1997; Raby, 2004; Schick & St. Denis, 2005; St. Denis & Hampton, 2002).

The widespread racial disparities currently found within Canadian political, economic and social institutions can be traced back to early colonial discourses and

practices that were discriminatory and oppressive towards radicalized groups (Henry et al, 1995). Canadian Native Studies Professor, Emma Larocque contends that because of the history of colonialism, First Nations and Métis peoples have experienced the detrimental impact of racializing processes ( Larocque, 1991). For example, racializing practices were a central factor in the organization and implementation of the residential school system for First Nations people, and those practices have continued to play out in public education. This is reflected in the Canadian 2001 Census that indicates 51% of the Aboriginal population has less than a high school graduation certificate compared to that of 31% of Canadians.

Aboriginal communities involved in educational research are universally in agreement that education is necessary and critical for the survival of their people, yet they speak overwhelmingly of negative school experiences that created a sense of alienation and dislocation on the part of students (Bowker, 1993; RCAP, 1996; St. Denis & Hampton, 2002). The research done on racial disparities among minority students in North American schools indicates that teacher behaviors, communications styles, and attitudes greatly influence student success (Bowker, 1993; Kailin, 1999, 2002; Ledlow, 1992; Lewis, 2001). Much of this research also reveals that issues such as racism, stereotyping, discrimination, suspension and retention rates are all realities that both parents and students of color must battle on a daily basis (Bowker, 1993; Kailin, 1999). In fact, in one such study even white students acknowledged that they were often given preferential treatment that afforded them special privileges that minority students did not receive (Kailin, 1999). As Larocque (1991) states:

Institutionalized racism conditions students to have racist views towards Indians. The effect on non-Native students is ignorance, fear and possible

hatred of Native peoples. The effect on Native children is self-rejection. The net effect on society is the stereotyping, mistrust, and mistreatment of Native peoples (p.74).

In spite of documented research, educational completion rates among racialized youth continues to be falsely attributed first and foremost to personal skill, intelligence and motivation, and believed to be fostered by family and community support. Consequently, if large numbers of racialized students are not succeeding in schools, the rationale is that they or their communities are deficient in various ways. While the number of minority youth that are being marginalized in the current system of education continues to grow, the possible explanations for this phenomenon rarely include an acknowledgement of the impact of racism. In her research done on retention rates among American Indian students, Bowker (1993) found that “Just as uncaring insensitive teachers were a significant factor in whether a girl dropped out of school, caring, sensitive teachers were a factor in keeping girls in school” (p.279).

Although race clearly remains a critical factor in the current gap in educational outcomes within Canadian schools, there have been relatively few studies which focus on how teachers understand this complex problem. According to existing research and literature, teachers construct the problem of educational failure for racialized students in a way that omits the significance of racism and racial inequality in education (Lund, 2006).

This study builds upon a research study done on racism in education by American anti-racist educator, Dr. Julie Kailin (1999). The purpose of Kailin’s study was to examine the ways in which practicing teachers perceive the problem of racism in schools, as their perceptions will influence how they interpret and respond to racial inequality.

Kailin’s (1999) study found that white teachers in particular (who are 90% of the

U.S. teaching force) play a pivotal role in race relations within the education system. While student diversity continues to increase here in Canada, the racial composition of our teaching force also remains predominantly white (Carr & Klassen, 1997; Schick, 2000a; Raby, 2004). A study done in Toronto, Ontario for example, indicated that while racial minorities made up 50% of the student body in secondary education, only 10% of the teaching staff included racial minorities (Carr and Klassen, 1997).

In addition to the disproportionately high number of white teachers, Kailin (1999, 2002) maintains that although racism has been a central problem in American life, there is relatively little research that analyzes how white educators understand this problem. Researchers such as Carr and Klassen (1997) and Lund (2006) have drawn similar conclusions within the Canadian context: “Teachers play a crucial role in the effective implementation of antiracist education and the success of change-based policies. However, teachers’ perceptions concerning racism and antiracist education have received little attention in the scholarly literature” (Carr & Klassen, 1997, p.67).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine teachers’ perceptions of racism in their schools here in Saskatchewan. These perceptions will influence and determine how we as educators interpret and respond to existing racial inequalities as they are perpetuated in schools. This study seeks to better understand how we as educators are rooted in and influenced by larger social systems that may inhibit our capacity to build inclusive schools. Using a questionnaire and focus group research method, this research study will explore how educators in Saskatchewan perceive and understand racial inequality in education.

### ***Organization of the Thesis***

Chapter One introduces the rationale for the research question explored in this study. Chapter Two provides a review of the pertinent literature in the areas of poststructural theories of identity construction, Critical Race Theory and whiteness in education, which I draw from in order to position myself in the research. Chapter Three describes the research methodology and methods used to conduct this study, including information on participants, data collection, and techniques for deconstructing the data. Chapter Four organizes the responses from the teacher-participant questionnaires thematically using discourse analysis to analyze the data. Chapter Five examines the major themes from the focus group study, centering on the barriers to anti-racist education and imagining and negotiating change. Chapter Six synthesizes the implications of the findings and discusses the significance of anti-racist education for contemporary education.

## **CHAPTER TWO:**

### **A Review of the Related Literature**

The purpose of this chapter is to review the related literature on the relationship between poststructural theories of identity construction, Critical Race Theory, and anti-racist, anti-oppressive education. This study investigates how teachers understand racism by applying the poststructural method of discourse analysis (Wetherell & Potter, 1992) to both the questionnaire and focus group discussions, in order to comprehend the correlation between teacher perceptions of racism and the construction of their own racialized identities.

The review has been organized by first introducing the significance of poststructural theories for understanding the production of our racialized identities. The second section will discuss how Critical Race Theory has influenced current theoretical analysis of racism. The third section will review pertinent studies which link white identity constructions with racism in colonized nations, with a particular focus on our educational institutions. In the final segment, I will draw from these theories to position myself within the research in order to analyze how anti-racist education has allowed me to begin to deconstruct my own identity as a white teacher.

#### ***Poststructural Theory of Discourse Analysis and Identity Construction***

Poststructuralist theory is one way researchers can investigate into relations between the individual and the social in specific sites. “ In terms of educational research,

what poststructuralist theories and methodologies allow is an understanding of the necessary complexity of the school as an institution and a set of social practices” (Lee, 1992, p.1). Because education is a social practice, it is crucial to engage in theories which interrogate the massive project of schooling children in contemporary society (Lee, 1992).

Many theoretical and political influences have helped constitute current poststructuralist theory. Some of these founding theories include the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure, the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser’s theory of ideology, Jacques Derrida’s theory of *differance* and Michel Foucault’s theory of discourse and power (Weedon, 1997). The term ‘poststructuralist’ does not have one fixed meaning but is generally applied to a range of theoretical positions. While different forms of poststructuralism vary both in their implications and practice, they share certain fundamental assumptions about language, meaning and subjectivity (St. Denis, 2002).

For poststructuralist theorists, the common factor in the analysis of individual consciousness, social organization, and power is language. Rather than seeing language as simply a vehicle of communication, poststructuralists view language as a system with its own rules and constraints which determine the way individuals think and express themselves (Mills, 1997; Weedon, 1997). Language influences the construction of social organizations, and this is where social and political consequences are defined and contested. Language is the place where our understanding of ourselves and our subjectivity is constructed. This implies that subjectivity is not innate or biologically determined, but socially constructed. Subjectivity is then produced by a range of economic, social, and political discursive practices:

Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed...subjectivity is produced in a whole range of discursive practices – economic, social, and political – the meanings of which are a constant site of struggle over power (Weedon, 1997, p.21).

Poststructuralists believe that language is not an expression of individuality; instead it constructs the individual in socially specific ways. This subjectivity is not fixed but is a constant site of contention (Hurtado & Stewart, 1997; Weedon, 1997). In this way, dominant discourse is productive of our social conditions and our identity. While meaning is in large part determined by language, institutional and social contexts play an important role in determining the maintenance and legitimization of dominant discourses (Burr, 1995; Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

While there are many definitions of discourse, Foucault focuses on discourse as a regulated practice which accounts for a number of statements (Mills, 1997). Foucault was not interested in finding the ‘truth’ within discourse, but in understanding how these discourses are produced, and analyzing what discourse production tells us about power relations. A further aspect of this definition of discourse is that it is considered to be organized around practices of exclusion. While Foucault believes power to be relational, he analyzes the processes of exclusion whereby some discourses are produced as the dominant discourses which are supported by institutions and respected by the majority of the population, while others are literally relegated to the margins of society (Burr, 1995; Mills, 1997). The production of what is considered to be ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’ is established by a range of institutions which legitimize them and these include libraries, legal institutions, publishing companies, and education systems (Weedon, 1997). As



Foucault (1981) states: “ What, after all, is an education system, other than a ritualization of speech, a qualification and fixing of roles for speaking subjects and distribution, and an appropriation of discourse with its powers and knowledges” (p.64).

Foucault argues that our education systems become sites for the production of discourses in that they regulate who can speak and what can pass for knowledge. We all come to operate within these discursive limitations, and this form of discipline becomes internalized as a form of self-discipline (Foucault, 1981). This theory of power relations informs this research study on many levels. Colonial power enables the production of knowledge and determines the powerful positions from which one can speak. While individuals cannot be held responsible for the large scale organization of imperialism which has informed our existing power relations, it is clear that individuals differ in the degrees to which they champion, challenge, or acquiesce to colonial discourse (Mills, 1997).

Colonial discourse within the Canadian context is determined by racial significations and forms of power, and these racial distortions construct our social conditions. While the actual causes for the subjugation of minority groups lie in the economic and political organization of Canadian institutions, dominant liberal discourses continue to justify hierarchies of power through the falsity of the ‘race’ concept (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). These discourses maintain ideologies which allow colonial powers to appear ‘neutral’ and ‘innocent’ in their pursuit of racial oppression. In this way, various ideologies create group and class alliances and new types of identity and subject positions (Burr, 1995; Mills, 1997; Ng, 1993; Weedon, 1997). It is important to note that while language and discourse are central to this process, racism is also

manifested in differences in opportunity, material disadvantage, physical violence, and unequal power relations (Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

The goal of poststructuralist analysis is to reveal the discursive practices through which the hierarchies of racial categories are constructed, and exploitation legitimated. The colonial structures within the Canadian context have been, and continue to be informed by racializing practices that produce and naturalize white supremacy.

### ***Critical Race Theory***

There is a growing body of work in educational scholarship that analyzes racializing practices, which draws its inspiration from Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT is a set of interrelated beliefs about the significance of racism and how it operates in western society (Gillborn, 2006). “CRT insists that racism be placed at the center of analyses and that scholarly work be engaged in the process of rejecting and deconstructing the current patterns of exclusion and oppression” (Gillborn, 2006, p.27).

CRT is linked to the development of African American thought in the post civil rights era, where legal scholars challenged the traditional philosophical position of a ‘liberal’ approach to social justice. “One shared point of critique is that racism should not be viewed as acts of individual prejudice that can simply be eradicated. Rather, it is an endemic part of everyday life, deeply ingrained through historical conscious and ideological choices about race” (Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999, p. 185).

Racism, as understood by Critical Race Theorists is ‘everywhere and nowhere’. It is both invisible and systemic in nature, which means that a specific ‘lens’ or theory and method needs to be used in order to understand where it exists and how it works. Critical

Race Theory examines the intersectionality of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation, and their interplay as separate and connecting disadvantaging factors (Lopez & Parker, 2003).

Critical Race Theory positions the racialization or Othering of certain groups at the center of the research, while recognizing that there are many intersecting factors that will influence any social context. Racialization refers to the production of racial groups based on the ideological belief that they share innate or essential ‘traits’ because of skin color or ethnicity. Critical Race Theorists reject these forms of essentialism, which imply that certain groups have innate qualities or characteristics that are pre-determined, and proposes the alternative to essentialism, which is that there is no such thing as inherent characteristics. Critical Race scholars theorize that while no one person has an easily stated identity, individuals within certain groups which have been socially constructed become identifiable through racializing beliefs and practices. The racialization of these groupings occurs when value is placed on their ethnicity or culture (Lopez & Parker, 2003).

According to Critical Race Theorists, the whole purpose for the social construction of race had been, and always will be, to serve in the interests of those deemed ‘white’. Racism only exists because of the values and assumptions that have been connected to specific racial attributes. “ In a world where whites hold most of the power – financial, legal, political, social – and where the tenants of racism remain firmly entrenched in the consciousness and unconsciousness of those whites, being deemed ‘white’ counts for a lot” (Ross, 2002, p.253).

Based on our colonial past, many anti-racist theorists assert that racism is a white problem and a problem that needs addressing in the white community (hooks, 1992; Morrison, 1992; McIntosh, 1998; Raby, 2004; Schick, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c; Sleeter, 1993). These authors argue that white people need to become aware of their own power and privilege to move away from ‘blaming the victim’ and viewing racialized communities as ‘deficient’, to understanding how their own identity production contributes to these meanings (Brantlinger, 2003; St. Denis, 2004) .

Critical Race Theory seeks to turn the focus away from those who continue to face systemic oppression, to analyzing the factors which provide access to privilege to those in power. In this way, the principles of Critical Race Theory can bring new insights to the application of research in education, and help to find new solutions for the inequities within the system.

Critical Race Theory challenges the assumption that student success rates in education are a direct result of individual motivation and capabilities (Lopez & Parker, 2003). The ‘common sense’ notion that in order to succeed an individual only has to ‘work hard’, as rewards are assigned to those who combine effort with talent, suggests that lack of success is then evidence of low intelligence, or lack of motivation and effort (St. Denis, 2004). This liberal notion of meritocracy relies on the belief that everyone has equal opportunities, ignoring the constraints of race, class, gender or sexual orientation, and disregarding the historical conditions which have shaped the dominant group’s access to social and institutional power (Briskin, 1994). It assumes power is equally available and distributed evenly.

While there are no canonical set of doctrines or methodologies to which Critical Race scholars working in education subscribe, these scholars are usually unified by two common interests: to understand how these ‘common sense’ notions of race remain in place, and to shatter the bonds between educational policies and racism (Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G. & Thomas, K., 1995; Gillborn, 2006). For example, Critical Race Theorists view the official school curriculum as a policy where culturally specific frameworks are designed to maintain power among privileged groups by focusing primarily on Eurocentric epistemologies (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

One of the most important aspects of CRT is the insistence that researchers focus on the *outcomes* and *effects* of oppression, rather than the ‘liberal’ rhetoric of equality. In this way, Critical Race Theory provides researchers with a contextual understanding of the disparity in education among students who have been racialized, focusing on the processes and practices that keep unequal power relations in place.

The significance of Critical Race Theory is its increasing application to scholarship in education. Critical Race Theory incorporates multiple ways of knowing and understanding based on difference, and can transform teaching and especially the interaction of knowledge, agency, and cultural identity that have been male biased and prescribed by Eurocentric values (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999).

CRT offers a way to understand how ostensibly race-neutral structures in education –knowledge, truth, merit, objectivity, and good education – are in fact ways of forming and policing racial boundaries. Researchers are using CRT to demonstrate that these standards may in fact be a form of colonialism, a way of imparting white, westernized standards and conceptions of enlightened thinking. (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p.21)

It has only been within the last two decades that theorists have begun to systematically investigate white racial identity development. Numerous studies on white identity have found that one way for teachers to teach more effectively is to develop a range of insights about their own socialization processes and their own identity locations as white teachers ( Kailin, 1999, 2002; McIntyre, 1998; Raby, 2004; Schick, 2000a; Sleeter, 1993; St. Denis & Schick, 2003). Teachers must reflect on the attitudes, beliefs and life experiences that have shaped them as part of an examination of how these forces can limit their understanding of the multiple forms of discriminatory practices that exist in our schools. This is a consciousness that requires an acknowledgment of the historical legacy of white identity constructions in the persistent structures of inequality and oppression (Hall, 1999; Ross, 2002).

### ***The Significance of White Teacher Identity Constructions in Education***

The invisible nature of whiteness supports the belief that white privilege is a ‘naturally occurring’ phenomenon, making it difficult to detect and therefore rarely questioned (Dyer, 1997; Hurtado & Stewart, 1997; Willinsky; 1998). Peggy McIntosh (1998) is one of many anti-racist scholars within whiteness studies who articulates exactly what white privilege provides, giving insight into the sense of entitlement that most white people carry in almost all social contexts. “Whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow ‘them’ to be more like ‘us’ (McIntosh, 1998, p.166). Because white privilege is perceived as a ‘natural’ state of affairs, it normalizes and justifies the belief in white superiority. “While race, including whiteness,

is a constructed and fluid identity location, it remains a powerful method through which to categorize, distinguish and 'other', and to legitimize inequalities"(Raby, 2004, p. 368).

Although McIntosh (1998) was not trained in school to see herself as an oppressor or an unfairly advantaged person, the list of privileges she was socialized to expect in almost all daily interactions trained her to feel and act superior to nonwhite people. She believed she was entitled to everything she had. For the most part, research has shown that few individuals who benefit from white privilege recognize it until it is threatened (Dyer, 1997; Hurtado & Stewart, 1997).

Many contemporary writers have explored the vacuous nature of whiteness. Tony Morrison (1992) writes about its parasitic nature; Patricia Hill Collins (1990) argues that without the production of the margins, or the Other, the dominant group would not know itself; Mary Louise Fellows and Sherene Razack (1998) describe how the dominant group makes itself through imagining itself as everything the Other is not. As David Roediger (1994) has commented about race, there is no content to whiteness outside of domination: whiteness is the "...empty and terrifying attempt to build an identity based on what one isn't and on whom one can hold back" (p.13).

While whiteness is an unstable concept that has not always been defined historically by skin color, it is always in the process of being produced by concepts such as ethnicity, occupation, class, and geographic location. As Richard Dyer (1997) argues, the institutions that work to legitimize the current dominant discourses and diffuse them into the mainstream such as media, politics and education are still in the hands of white people, and continue to speak for whites while claiming to speak for all humanity.

According to Schick (2000a, 2000b, 2000c) the white middle class searches for legitimacy by defining respectability, therefore securing access to privilege. The white middle class assures its own dominance through the racialization of the Other (Dyer, 1997; hooks, 1992; Morrison, 1992). This construction and defining of boundaries that occurred during colonization continues through our education systems (Dyer, 1997).

The educational policies and rules created and policed by us as white middle class teachers continue to define what constitutes knowledge and who has the authority to speak (Willinsky, 1998). In fact, the teaching profession has been produced as predominantly white to ensure the reproduction of the status quo, and as Schick (2000a, 2000c) has noted, white women in particular living in a patriarchal society are drawn to education seeking a form of middle class authority and legitimacy.

Our identities as white teachers are created, defined and cultivated through various discursive processes and social practices steeped in nation building (Willinsky, 1998). Within this context, white teachers unknowingly become the gatekeepers to white respectability, and schools are one of the places where racial lines continue to be drawn and redrawn for the masses (Kailin, 2002; Lewis, 2001; Schick, 2000a, 2000c).

Yet teachers cannot simply be blamed without considering the social context in which we have all been immersed (Kailin, 1999). The goal of this type of analysis is not to label or demonize individuals, but to reveal the discursive processes and practices through which racial categories are constructed and maintained (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Educators do not need to create these narratives, they are readily available as the dominant discourses within society, and teachers are rarely offered alternatives. This is why understanding our own identity construction as white teachers becomes a crucial



component to understanding racism.

There have been numerous research studies which have focused on disrupting dominance and privilege by analyzing white identity constructions. Scholars such as Juilie Kailin (1999), Alice McIntyre (1997), Christine Sleeter (1993), and Carol Schick (2000a, 2000c) have worked towards creating consciousness to the realities of race, class and gender in white pre-service and in-service educators. These studies have revealed some of the ways in which race, class and gender have come to influence our institutional and social structures, and how this is being played out in our schools.

Many of these studies have also indicated that anti-racist education can be used to disrupt the current dominant liberal discourses which have become the foundation of educational theory and practice ( Kailin, 1999, 2002; St. Denis & Schick, 2003; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Because white teachers become invested in many of these discourses, researchers have found that deconstructing white privilege can often cause feelings of guilt, discomfort, and ultimately anger or resistance.

In the studies done by Kailin (1999), McIntyre (1997), Sleeter (1993), Schick (2000a) and others, there were numerous barriers which made analyzing racism among educators a difficult process. The majority of the white pre-service and in-service teachers from these studies perceived racism as individual acts of bigotry, overlooking issues of institutional and systemic racism. Wetherell & Potter (1992) refer to such forms of individualism as the ‘prejudice problematic’, arguing that these discourses fulfill ideological roles for white people:

Accounting in terms of prejudice can draw attention away from immediate social reform towards utopian visions; it can provide a logic and method for justifying individual conduct; and it can establish a positive identity and a benevolent

‘vocabulary of motives’ *vis-à-vis* other, supposedly less enlightened, individuals” (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p.201).

Overwhelmingly, these studies also revealed that teachers believe they do not *see* color, insisting that they treat all of their students equally. Teacher-participants sometimes identified racism among their colleagues, but often distanced themselves from these acts, negating their privileged positions within a social context of white supremacy (Kailin, 1999; MacIntyre 1997; Schick, 2000a; Sleeter, 1993).

These studies also indicate that teacher-participants understand the current gaps in educational completion rates among racialized youth to be caused by cultural deficiencies and cultural determinism (St. Denis, 2004). This explanation reverts back to essentialist notions of ‘cultural traits’ among ethnic groups, and blames the victim for their own oppression. It also assumes that cultural discontinuity is the primary cause of educational failure, a theory which has come under scrutiny in numerous studies (Bowker, 1992; Ledlow, 1993; St. Denis, 2004). While many of these barriers can be challenging for scholars who are working to interrogate whiteness within the education system, anti-racist theorists continue to believe education is the logical site where white privilege and dominance can be disrupted and challenged (Bowker, 1993; Kailin, 1999, 2002; McIntyre, 1997; Raby, 2004).

The term anti-racist anti-oppressive education broadly encompasses approaches to education that actively challenge different forms of oppression. As anti-racist educator Kevin Kumashiro (2002) explains, anti-racist education involves examining how multiple forms of oppression and marginalization rely on similar processes, practices and ideologies that normalize discrimination against particular groups. In this way, anti-racist

education includes analyzing various forms of oppression such as racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, anti-semitism, ableism, and other 'isms'. The goal of anti-racist education is to challenge these multiple forms of oppression. As educators, we need to examine not only how some groups and identities are Othered, which means they are marginalized, denigrated, and violated in society, but also how some groups are favored, normalized, and privileged (Kumashiro, 2002). Our schools are arguably one of the central institutions involved in the drawing and redrawing of these racial lines (Lewis, 2001).

The colonial discourses which have produced the Aboriginal identity here in Canada were constructed on notions of the racialized Other as 'uncivilized', 'deficient' and 'inferior'. These ideologies provide the foundation for white superiority, which continues to be perpetuated in the literature, textbooks, and individual perceptions of our teachers (Larocque, 1991; Willinsky, 1998). In this sense, while the racism being transmitted into our classrooms may not be personal or 'intentional', racialized youth become dehumanized by these forms of institutional racism (Larocque, 1991). While there are numerous studies that have revealed the significant impact racism has on students, parents, and teachers of color, educators from the dominant white group continue to deny its existence and relevancy.

Research indicates that teachers play a decisive role in the success rates of their students (Bowker, 1993; Farkas, 2003; Ledlow, 1992). Given this reality, it is imperative that we as white educators understand our own identity construction, and begin to analyze the current discursive processes which determine the identity constructions of communities that have been Othered. While institutional racism remains a significant

barrier for racialized youth due to our colonial past, these structures can only be transformed by creating consciousness in individual teachers within the education system.

### ***Background to the Study: Erasing Whiteness***

This study is informed by my position as a white middle-class female teacher. As a secondary teacher who has been teaching Native Studies to predominantly Aboriginal students for the last fourteen years, I have been troubled by questions of how to create equity and social justice in education. As a teacher, I have witnessed countless numbers of racial incidents both through my own observations, and through stories recounted to me by my students. Aboriginal students have repeatedly shared the anger and pain of feeling isolated and targeted at school. I also became aware of a silent yet disturbing segregation in the building, something intangible that separated those students who ‘belonged’ in the school, from those who did not. While I understood in a very abstract way that Aboriginal people face both institutional and systemic racism throughout Canada, I was invested in the belief that it was the individual acts of racists and bigots that were at the core of racial discrimination.

I can recall feeling disdain towards what I considered to be ‘racist white folk’, whom I embarrassingly referred to as white trash, unintentionally flexing my own form of classism in search of a term that would somehow distinguish them from me. I believed white racists were products of ignorance, and I was not like them - I was special. The biggest irony from these recollections is that while I taught my students about institutional and systemic racism, the very way in which I positioned myself throughout this time period reveals how invested I was in individualism. I can remember feeling

pleased each time an Aboriginal student suggested to me that I was “not like a white person”, believing this was the highest compliment that could be bestowed upon me. I spoke of power and authority with complete disregard for my own position of privilege, and despite my intentions, I continue to find new ways to reproduce my own innocence within a racist society.

It was not until I entered Graduate Studies in Educational Foundations at the University of Saskatchewan that I came to understand how living within a racist society informs my position. It was my introduction to anti-racist education which led me to realize that as a middle class, able bodied, educated, heterosexual white woman I am privileged in numerous ways, but much like Peggy McIntosh (1998) states in *Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*, “I did not see myself as racist because I was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial domination on my group from birth” (p. 169). While I have always been passionate about issues of social justice, it has taken me 39 years to understand that I cannot work against racism until I understand its place in my own life (Norquay, 1993). I must try to expose the various ways in which dominant ideologies and practices conceal my own part in racism (Frankenberg, 1996; hooks, 1992; McIntosh, 1998; Norquay, 1993), and work to understand all of the ways in which being part of the dominant group informs me.

While I question whether we can ever fully unravel the ways in which colonialism has come to influence our discursive processes and social practices (Willinsky, 1998), this study has convinced me that as educators, our work towards building inclusive

schools must include understanding how our identities are produced by historical processes and practices built on racist ideologies.

While I used to try and separate myself from colleagues that I believed were racist, I now reposition myself as part of the dominant group that benefits from racism. I have come to realize that I cannot separate myself from the social structures that have been created by oppressive policies and practices, because I continue to benefit from them. As anti-racist educator Audrey Thompson (2003) suggests, white people working in anti-racism are sometimes seduced into congratulating ourselves for having ‘evolved’ into some mythical anti-racist hero, without stopping to realize that this is a life long journey - There is no end point where one can state...*I am no longer racist*:

For we have, built into all of us, old blueprints of expectation and response, old structures of oppression, and these must be altered at the same time as we alter the living conditions which are a result of those structures...as Paulo Freire shows so well in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us, and which knows only the oppressors’ tactics, the oppressors’ relationships (Lorde, 2005, p.342).

While the road to building racial consciousness must continue to be made and remade, in spite of the uncertainties, I believe this is a journey worth taking. It is in this spirit that this research is offered.

## **CHAPTER THREE:**

### **Research Methodology**

The first section of this chapter will summarize Kailin's (1999) research and provide a rationale for drawing from this particular study within a Canadian context. It will then describe the context of the schools that participated in the study, and review both the organization of the data collection, and the format for the analysis of the data. The following sections will briefly refer to the teacher-participant reaction to the presentation of the data, and describe the formation of the focus groups within each school. Finally, the questionnaire and the initial focus group questions that were given to the teacher-participants will be provided. This research study was coordinated and conducted in consultation with my colleague and co-researcher Tyler McCreary, who is a graduate student at the University of Saskatchewan.

#### ***Kailin's Research Study***

In her research study, Kailin (1999) used three open-ended questions to invite predominantly white educators who were teaching in schools with a diverse student population to narrate their personal perceptions of racism. Kailin's rationale for exploring teacher perceptions included the central conviction that, "Before we can introduce teachers to antiracist multicultural teaching, we must first locate their perceptions and assumptions about racism, especially considering the processes through which most

White people have been taught certain racist constructions in the first place” (Kailin, 1999, p.725).

Kailin(1999) collected her data as part of a professional development in-service on racism in education, and coded the data following three major themes which emerged from the participant surveys: (a) Attribution of Racial Problems to Blacks, (b) Attribution of Racial Problems to Whites, and (c) Attribution of Racial Problems to Institutional/Cultural factors (p.731). Kailin found that the majority of the teacher participants were invested in narrating racism as individual acts of racism caused by Black students, Black teachers and/or Black parents (45.5%). The frequency with which whites were narrated as being involved in racist acts came second at 41.6% and institutional/cultural racism was only observed in 12.8% of the surveys (p.731). Kailin also created sub-themes within each category to explain in detail how racism is perceived (ie: Black students are intimidating, White teachers are heard making racist remarks, etc.)(p.731). Kailin used this data to explore the various ways that teacher-participants understood and explained how racism is manifested within education. Once the data were coded, Kailin returned for an in-service with the teacher participants to discuss the results.

The results of this study indicated that while Lakeview was a school district known for excellence and tolerance, the academic outcomes for students of color were problematic. Very few of the Lakeview teachers cited structural or institutional root causes for racism, in fact the majority of the teacher participants defined racism as individual acts of prejudice. Educators also viewed the racialized minority (who in this



study were predominantly Black students) as deficient, often ‘blaming the victim’, allowing white privilege to go unacknowledged and remain intact.

Kailin’s study also revealed that white teacher participant perceptions of racism in their schools reflected dominant stereotypes and projections of Blacks from within the society which depict them as ‘threatening’. Under the guise of teacher professionalism, participants often used coded language such as ‘those people’, to draw boundaries between themselves and the Other, in an attempt to avoid overtly racist remarks. Black students who observed and reported racist incidents were accused by white teachers of ‘playing the race card’ in order to manipulate their circumstances or gain special treatment. While 16% of the white teacher participants admitted they had heard colleagues make racist remarks, they protected the identity of the accused, and admitted that they did nothing about the incident (Kailin, 1999). Teachers also attempted to trivialize such behavior with statements such as ‘but he is mean to everyone’, in order to maintain their notions of schools and teachers as ‘race’ neutral. Kailin argues that this silencing contributes to the persistence of racism, and allows the systematic discrimination of students of color to go unchecked.

Kailin’s study confirms the fact that in a society where we have white racial domination, racial categories and assumptions left unchallenged will be normalized as ‘common sense’ racism. Kailin’s study also suggests that the dysconscious racism among educators is an effect of the dominant discourse in American education and culture, and for this reason we cannot simply blame teachers without considering the social context in which we have all been educated *not to see* (Kailin, 1999). Dysconscious racism is not the absence of consciousness, but an impaired or distorted way of thinking about race that

accepts dominant white norms and privileges. It is an uncritical habit of mind that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things (Kailin, 1999; King, 1991). Kailin contends that teachers must be given the opportunity to see themselves as part of a larger system, whose individual perceptions are an effect of this context and reflect the dominant discourse throughout the West (St. Denis & Schick, 2003; Wetherell & Potter, 1992; Willinsky, 1998,).

In this study, Kailin presented the data results to the teachers as a way to engage in dialogue on an issue that had been previously silenced. These discussions provided them with an opportunity to see themselves as members of a dominant group who have the power and ability to unknowingly impose their own categories and assumptions onto their minority students.

### ***Rationale for Research in Saskatchewan***

Given my position as a white female educator working in anti-racist anti-oppressive education, I hypothesized that although our context in the Prairies is historically and geographically different from that of 'Lakeview', a study done here would have similar results. This hypothesis comes initially from a critical/reflexive view of the system of education in which I have been involved as a teacher for fifteen years, and more recently from an engagement with anti-racist literature, which has provided the theory and research that has furthered my ability to understand and analyze the issues in our current context.

Much like other colonial countries, the national discourses produced within Canadian schools serves to justify white supremacy and legitimate white power (Schick,

2000a, 2000b, 2000c; St. Denis & Hampton, 2002; Willinsky, 1998). School systems throughout the Prairies have a long history of producing discourses that reinforce contradictions regarding Aboriginal education (Schick, 2000a; St. Denis & Schick, 2003; St. Denis, 2004). These discourses further reify the status quo and center the focus for 'change' on the Other, who in this context are Aboriginal people (St. Denis, 2004).

It has been my observation that contemporary discourses among educators continue to rely on deficiency theories to explain why Aboriginal youth are over-represented among students who are struggling to succeed within the current structures of the school system. Deficiency theories pathologize the Other, their families, their culture, and their community in order to explain the gap in success rates among racialized minorities that have been produced by historical processes and practices (Brantlinger, 2003; Kailin, 1999, 2002; Larocque, 1991; McIntyre, 1997). These dominant narratives then determine the solutions that are sought (St. Denis & Hampton, 1992). It is significant to note that the deficiency theory has also been used in other colonial countries to both explain and justify the gap in student success rates between white students, and students of color (Gaine, 2000; Lea & Helfand, 2004; McConaghy, 2002; Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

One of the many symptoms that results from the racialization that occurs here in the Prairies is that in spite of the diversity and unique individuality among First Nations and Métis youth, they are consistently over-represented among students who do not complete their education (St. Denis & Hampton, 2002). As a result, they are systematically devalued in our society as social, economic, intellectual and political agents.

While the number of students that are being marginalized by the current system of education continues to grow, it is clear that minority youth face barriers that have yet to be fully acknowledged. While much of our educational discourse has focused on how issues of language, culture and community can be understood as having an impact on student success, this research study uses anti-racist principles to turn the gaze away from the marginalized student and their community toward the classroom, in order to analyze the teacher as variable. It was my desire to use this study to begin research that would provide educators with access to anti-racist anti-oppressive education, which critiques our obsessive focus on the Other as deficient (Brantlinger, 2003; Lea & Helfand, 2004) . Research such as this supports the professional development of educators by opening space for dialogue on issues that have traditionally been silenced, allowing educators to analyze the historical and contextual impact of the processes of racialization on our education system (Rodriguez, 1998).

### ***School Context and Setting***

For the purposes of anonymity, both the high schools and the participants analyzed in this study will be given pseudonyms. The high school that will be referred to as 'Riverside' is situated in a multicultural area of the city, and is considered to be a community school with comprehensive programming. Approximately 30% of the 1500 members of the Riverside student body identify as Aboriginal. There are also a number of minority students who have recently immigrated to Canada who are referred to by teacher-participants as ESL (English as a Second Language) students. The high school that will be referred to as 'Center' High school is identified as an 'academic' school

within a predominantly middle-class white area of the city. While Center High has a program for international students, it claimed to have only 4 students out of approximately 1100 who identified as Aboriginal. As indicated earlier, educators from these two schools were asked to share their personal views on racism within their schools.

Out of a staff of approximately 100 educators and support staff at Riverside High, 72 chose to participate in the questionnaires. At the Center High school location, out of approximately 75 educators and support staff, only 26 chose to respond. There are many variables which may have affected the number of staff who chose to participate in the questionnaire. One possible explanation was the way in which we as the researchers, in consultation with the administration, chose to organize the time staff had to complete and hand in the responses, as it was comparatively different in the two schools. While Riverside teachers were asked to answer the questions and hand them in to us at the end of the morning session, Center High teachers were given the entire day to complete the questions, which meant many of them may have gone on to do other business within their classrooms. The other possible variable comes from the perception by Center High staff that because their school is predominantly white, racism is not an issue that needed to be addressed, making a questionnaire about racism seem irrelevant.

While teachers were asked to complete the forms in the allotted time period, they were also informed that if they needed more time they could hand them in at the end of the week, in a sealed box in the main office of the school.

### ***Questionnaire Data Collection***

The participants chosen were in-service high school teachers from a mid-sized Prairie city. Recruitment was done through the formal school channels of the Administration and the school based Professional Development Committees. Two high schools were invited to participate. In order to research a sample from the diversity of schools in the city, one east-side school and one west-side school was selected. The decision to choose two schools from divergent areas of the city came from an interest in comparing teacher perceptions of racism in a predominantly white school, to those teaching in a school that is considered to be multicultural (Lund, 2006). Using two contrasting schools from different areas of the city also ensures that the methodology is balanced.

The invitation was extended to high schools as part of their professional development towards building inclusive school culture and climate. Each staff member from the schools choosing to participate was given a consent form (Appendix C) regarding their participation in the survey and focus group session. Confidentiality of survey and focus group responses were guaranteed. As educated professionals, the staff clearly understood their right to refuse participation, or to withdraw participation at any time. Their professional status also meant that they are not a vulnerable group according to ethical research standards. All teachers were invited to participate in the questionnaire and focus group sessions.

Once the two schools were chosen, the researchers along with the Administration and Professional Development Committees chose a designated time and location for

distribution of the surveys. The surveys were distributed to the staff during a staff meeting and were returned to the researchers that day. Some of the participants requested more time, and were given a week to hand in the surveys in a box in the main office. Some participants wrote as little as a few lines or one paragraph, and others took the time to write several pages. This indicates that some educators felt this issue had a significant impact on their teaching and the school. The teacher-participants were reminded that they could withdraw their data at any time.

Once the data was collected, the coding and analysis of the data was done by identifying specific themes and topics which emerged from the data regarding the perceptions participants have of racial incidence and how these are narrated (Hyttén & Warren, 2003; Kailin; 1999, 2002; McIntyre, 1997; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Once the data was analyzed, my co-researcher and I returned to the schools to present the findings to the staff in a Professional Development in-service. The group size and setting allowed for discussion of topics in an open professional environment. This space acted as a public forum among staff members, who frequently analyze and discuss issues that affect their teaching practice in this manner.

### ***Presentation of the questionnaire data.***

The data presentations at both Riverside and Center High were organized to be approximately one hour in length (refer to Appendix E for the questionnaire). My co-researcher and I were invited to present the data to the Center High staff for one session, and then to Riverside the next day as part of staff professional development. The data was organized thematically on a power point presentation which first introduced our analysis

of the data, and then provided a brief explanation of anti-racist theory. This presentation allowed us to address any questions or concerns regarding the findings, and teacher-participants were given the opportunity to discuss the impact this may have on both individual students and the school climate in general.

The analysis of the data suggested that both schools have a climate that is hostile for racialized youth, particularly towards Aboriginal people. The presentation also pointed to the lack of acknowledgment and limited understanding the majority of these teacher-participants have regarding racial oppression.

The cumulative nature of the presentation of the themes clearly had an impact on many of the teacher-participants. While the staff from both schools engaged in questions and discussion following the presentation of the data, it was apparent to both my co-researcher and I that the Riverside staff appeared to be much more troubled, and defensive at the suggestion that their school has a racially hostile climate. While the reactions to the data presentations are discussed in more detail in Chapter Five, it is important to note that the overall reaction of teachers from both schools was one of disbelief and denial that racism may be a problem. The levels of discomfort, however, were much more overt among the Riverside staff, who reacted by minimizing the data and vehemently objecting to the idea that racism exists at their school.

### ***Data Coding***

Our data was coded using the same method as Kailin (1999), who searched for similar themes and discourses that emerged from the data. The data was initially separated into two major themes:



- 1) Racism defined by individual acts
- 2) Racism defined as institutional/systemic.

There were also sub-themes generated from teachers' perceptions of racism within the data such as; (a) student to student acts of racism (b) teacher to teacher acts of racism (c) teacher to student acts of racism, and (d) student to teacher acts of racism. This research also coded the data according to any racial categories that were used such as 'racism against Aboriginal people', 'racism against white people', 'racism against black people', in order to indicate which groups were perceived as experiencing racism.

### ***Discourse Analysis***

There are various different approaches to discourse analysis which have been used to understand how people construct race in speech and writing. While poststructuralists believe discourses produce subjectivity, an important tenet of poststructuralism is that individuals are not only constituted in discourse, but are also constitutive of discourse. In this way, discourses are performative, and therefore are considered a form of social action. According to Wetherell & Potter (1992) discourse analysis must examine how subjects are formed, and how the social world is understood and categorized. Researchers analyzing how race is conceptualized in text and talk have studied the discursive actions of identifying, naming, categorizing, justifying, rationalizing and blaming, as these serve to both structure and alter how individuals and groups are racialized. Individuals also perform identity and power in the way that they position themselves, how they interact, and what is assumed or left unsaid. In their study of white discourse in New Zealand, Wetherell & Potter (1992) note that individuals often follow discursive categories that

have become legitimated by arguments that justify or deny racial inequalities. These categories are available discursive resources used by speakers and writers.

Many discourse analysts examine the patterns that emerge when speakers and writers use discursive resources to perform actions such as repositioning themselves, avoiding responsibility, and justifying inequalities (Wood & Kroger, 2000). For the purposes of this study, I searched the texts and talk from the questionnaire and focus group data for specific quotations and references that revealed a pattern of discursive resources similar to those done in other research studies on racism in education. One of the key focuses of discourse analysis done on race has been to interrogate how white people use discursive resources to justify and solidify white privilege. These studies provide a useful framework for linking certain types of discourses and rhetoric to racist ideologies, and can expose how white teachers understand and narrate racism in education.

It was not necessarily surprising, yet very disheartening to discover that many of the themes and discourses from the data were both familiar and recognizable from other studies I have examined on racism in colonial countries. While there were some variations between Riverside and Center high school, and minor variations between this study and that of Kailin's (1999), the national discourses which were revealed in this study are clearly pervasive and abiding.

### ***Focus Group Data Collection***

After the data results were presented to the staff members, co-researcher Tyler and I distributed letters of information to the staff regarding a designated time and place for a smaller focus group discussion. The participation in the focus groups was voluntary,

and the focus group setting took place as an informal group discussion that was audio recorded. Focus groups were formed in both schools with one participant from Center High, and four participants from Riverside which made a total of five participants.

Tyler and I ensured strict confidentiality to all participants, including the school and school division, in reporting the research results in both published documents and oral presentations. Contributions will remain confidential and will be protected through the use of pseudonyms. Any personal identifying information and/or direct words that may compromise participant identification were altered to protect the participant's identity.

The focus groups began with a discussion of the research protocol and the researchers distributed and discussed the consent forms. Then focus groups were given questions that Tyler and I had pre-selected, and participants were invited to respond. The focus group discussion was loosely structured around dominant themes emerging from the analysis of survey responses (refer to Appendix F for the initial focus group questions). These focus group discussions were recorded using audio equipment. These recordings were transcribed, and the transcripts used for analysis. No records of participant names were maintained, and speakers were identified by pseudonyms.

The focus group sessions consisted of four separate sessions, with approximately one hour of discussion with one teacher-participant from Center High (Midge), and approximately three hours of discussion with four teacher-participants from Riverside (Veronica, Betty, Archie and Jughead). These pseudonyms were chosen by the participants from a popular comic book series that caricatures high school teenagers. While these particular names were randomly chosen in a lighthearted fashion, they also

worked to distract us momentarily from a very serious topic that is not usually discussed among educators.

There were four females involved in these discussions, and one male. The four teacher-participants from Riverside asked to meet more than once, and Tyler and I were happy to comply. All of the participants identified themselves as white teachers at some point in the discussion, and all of them indicated that they had several years of teaching experience.

The focus group data was also analyzed thematically. This included a detailed account of how educators narrate racism within a small group discussion. The focus groups allowed for more time to discuss the presentation of the survey data results presented during professional development, and allowed teachers to respond to the interpretation and analysis of the data results. Each of the sub-themes in Chapter Five emerged from the focus group participants own observations and concerns as high school educators.

For the purposes of the focus group analysis, I will be observing how we as white teachers position ourselves within a racialized context, and which available discursive resources we used to understand, explain and disrupt racism in education. Much like Sleeter (1993), McIntyre (1997), Kailin (1999, 2002), and Schick (2000a, 2000c) have found in their research, white educators like myself use patterns of discourse that produce similar themes which reveal how teachers understand their own identity construction, how they construct the racialized Other, how they define racism in education, and how they explain racial inequality in education. These were the discursive practices I expected to find, as well as ways in which educators may also disrupt the discourses commonly

found in education in an attempt to create space for learning. These focus group discussions were an opportunity to observe how anti-racist education can change the way white teachers think about themselves, and the systemic nature of racism in the schools.

## **CHAPTER FOUR:**

### **Data Analysis: The Race to Innocence**

The purpose of the questionnaire was to understand how a staff of predominantly white teachers perceives racism in education within a Canadian context. The following data reveals how dominant discourses produce whiteness in education as ‘neutral’ and ‘objective’ within a white supremacist context. Teacher -participants in this study consistently used discourse in the surveys that constructed their own innocence in the face of systemic racism. The construction of innocence is maintained through various myths and ideologies which are an essential part of our national discourse, and were consistently present in both Riverside and Center High school data. Some of the themes that emerged from this research data have also been identified in research on white identity constructions and racial discourse by researchers in other colonial countries such as Wetherell and Potter (1992) in New Zealand, McIntyre (1997) in the United States, Gaine (2000) in Great Britain, and Kailin (2002) in the United States. While the individual stories written by the teacher- participants from this study varied from one questionnaire to the next, four common themes emerged that collectively work together to construct white teacher identity as ‘innocent’.

The first theme that is essential to the construction of teacher- participant innocence is the focus on (a) *Individual Forms of Racism* (Kailin, 2002). The second theme, which also focuses on individualism was the overwhelming occurrence of

teachers narrating (b) *Student to Student Incidents of Racism*, which was perceived by teacher participants to be the most common form of racism in education. The third theme that appeared as a construction of innocence was the argument that students who accused teacher-participants of racism were (c) *Playing the Race Card* (Dei, Karumanchery, Karumanchery-Luik, 2004). The fourth and final theme which emerged from the data that supports the construction of innocence was teacher- participants (d) *Telling on Each Other* (Schick, 2000a).

As stated previously, the production of our identities as educators determines both how we perceive ourselves and how we perform in the world around us. As educators, we are often unaware of our own ideological beliefs and how our subjective identities reflect an uncritical perspective of the existing social order. These narratives of innocence are not unique to the institution of education or to teachers, but are part of a global discourse which seeks to construct white racial domination as something incidental that has little recourse for white people.

### ***Individual Forms of Racism***

The first theme that is essential to the construction of teacher- participant innocence is the focus on *Individual Forms of Racism* (Kailin, 2002). All of the participants from Riverside and Center High focused their discussion of racism in the schools on individual acts of racism, with only one survey from Riverside high mentioning institutional racism in the form of holidays:

*“There are always instances of institutional racism that are evident in the way we do business at the school. Examples of this would be Christmas and Easter holidays.”(RS-17)*

Teacher-participants' focus on individual acts of racism supports the view of racism as something residing only within individual attitudes and beliefs. Racism, by such accounts is a singular and extraordinary problem in 'them' (the racists) that is imposed upon certain groups that are perceived to be different (Montgomery, 2005). The majority of the participants wrote about one or two specific incidents which they could recall, and most of these incidence included racial slurs in the form of stereotypes and derogatory comments. The responses were divided and coded by the following themes which emerged from the data:

#### RIVERSIDE HIGH SCHOOL

- Student to Student Racial Incidents (40 responses)
- Teacher to Student Racial Incidents (19 responses)
- Teacher to Teacher Racial Incidents (10 responses)
- Institutional Racism (1 response)
- Other Incidents (4 responses)
- Could not recall racism (2 responses)

#### CENTER HIGH SCHOOL

- Student to Student Racial Incidents (27 responses)
- Teacher to Student Racial Incidents (6 responses)
- Teacher to Teacher Racial Incidents (4 responses)
- Teacher/Parent Racial Incidents (4 responses)
- Segregated/Exclusionary Culture (14 responses)
- Could not recall any racism (5 responses)
- (5 stated this, however, 3 then mentioned stereotyping or segregation)

While Riverside and Center High are contextually different in numerous ways, the discourses that were used to identify and narrate what they perceived as individual acts of racism in the school were almost identical. The majority of the teacher-participants from



both schools focused on student to student acts of racism, followed by accounts of teacher to student acts of racism, and finally teacher to teacher incidents of racism. There were a high number (14 responses) of teacher participants from Center High who identified racism as creating an exclusionary climate, where minority students are marginalized by a predominantly white middle-class student body. Center High participants seemed willing to discuss this segregation based on ethnicity as it was believed to affect a relatively small number of students within their school.

In contrast, while the Riverside teachers have a large number of Aboriginal and ESL students, they did not identify the numerous reports of individual acts of racism (particularly against Aboriginal students) as causing segregation within their school. How this can be accounted for is unclear. Either the students from Riverside somehow resist exclusion in spite of the pervasive racism that teacher-participants witness in the school, or Riverside teachers are unable or unwilling to see the impact this environment has on Aboriginal and minority students. What is clear is that discursive processes are constructed not only by what is being said, but also by what remains unspoken. It is possible that given the high number of Aboriginal students who leave or are removed from school each year at Riverside, the implications of what *seeing* means is too great.

The focus on individual acts of racism ignores institutional and systemic racism in education and allows teachers, who are already produced as neutral and objective, to position themselves outside of racist social structures within our society. The notion that racism only exists as individual acts of meanness also supports long held beliefs that our society is built on meritocracy, which denies historical oppressions. This focus on

individual acts of racism allows teachers to deny systemic racism as a possible explanation for the racial inequalities that exist today.

### ***Student to Student Incidents of Racism***

The sub-theme to individual acts of racism that was clearly evident was the overwhelming occurrence of teachers narrating *Student to Student Incidents of Racism*, which was perceived by teacher participants to be the most common form of racism in education.

Teacher-participants shared numerous examples of generalized stereotypes, prejudice and racial slurs they had witnessed regarding Aboriginal people from their students. These stereotypes and racial slurs constitute ideas held about certain individuals based on their perceived membership in a group, and were the most reported of any type of incident. All of the stereotypes reflected negative views of Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people were viewed as violent, criminal, the cause of gangs, lazy, getting/taking everything for free, poor, and implicitly inferior. Because many Aboriginal people live on the west side of the city chosen for this study, participants frequently referred to the spaces in which groups were thought to belong, rather than overtly naming the racialized group. These references to space become the code for race:

*“When classroom discussion centers on the city, the majority of students fall into the east / west bias - east side being viewed as [a] safe haven, while the west side is generally viewed as rife with gangs, crime, and violence.” (CH-16)*

*“My students were required to jot down/brainstorm a list of stereotypes re: a variety of different groups...The stereotypes listed about First Nations people were entirely negative and very disturbing. None of my students were visibly First Nations”(RS-10)*

*“One boy’s aunt was native and he told me he refused to work on a group project with two girls from the volleyball team who said they were playing in the [West side] Tournament and feared they would get raped by ‘some Indian’.... Generally grade nine and ten athletes express fear when going to play a west side school. Usually these statements don’t mention race but there is a race component to the fear.” (CH-1)*

These stereotypes create a school environment where it is clear that Aboriginal people do not belong. Aboriginal people were consistently portrayed as belonging to (and causing) violence and disorder. The teacher participants from Center High in particular portrayed students as believing their school to be safe because it is on the east side of the city and in a predominantly white area, while schools on the west side of the city were considered to be unsafe. While the surveys from Riverside did not refer to east side/west side spaces as frequently, the same stereotypes of Aboriginal people were present. The cumulative impression from reading the surveys from both high schools indicated that these schools were an unwelcoming space for Aboriginal people.

The stereotypical beliefs and racial slurs that teacher- participants witnessed towards Aboriginal people from the students exemplify the ‘common sense’ racism that has been woven into the fabric of our society (Kumashiro, 2004). The same myths regarding Aboriginal people were being reported by teacher- participants again and again. These stereotypes are significant as they work to justify the reality of systemic oppression, and become a convenient explanation for the inequalities that exist today:

*“Some specific student comments in class were: How hard is it to stay out of jail? What is wrong with these people? Indians are better off than we are, they get everything free. I am so tired of this Indian issue all the time, you can’t make me care! They should ‘get a job’ was said several times. These remarks centered around stereotypes of Natives as alcoholics and criminals. The writing of most students indicate a large degree of ignorance about Native people and taxation dominated their writing.” (CH-1)*

*“...the writing that emerged ...was somewhat shocking. ... [Many students] referenced the educational opportunities available to First Nations people as a reason why poverty and unemployment are unacceptable.”(CH-7)*

*“Often students would make derogatory comments about Natives, or speak in the ‘Native dialect’ about getting drunk. One student was in class speaking in a Native dialect about drinking on the weekend. There was a Native girl in the same class...I asked him how he thought the student (Native) felt hearing him talk like that. He said he forgot she was in the room. I asked him if it was ok to be racist as long as it is not in front of someone of a different race...he didn’t get the point and I was very discouraged.”(RS-54)*

*“A group of young men expressed their opinions about the ‘Indian’ population within Saskatchewan. They felt that the First Nations population had numerous liberties that were unfair. They believed that Indians were lazy and expected everything for free.” (RS-8)*

The repeated reporting of these forms of overt racism indicates the reality of racism within the school, creating a racially antagonistic (or hostile) school climate for Aboriginal students, teachers and parents, and other racially marginalized groups:

*“Socially, [ Center High ] reveals very little outward racism, but in observing who people chose to befriend and spend time with, one can clearly see that the ‘color-blindness’ many students claim to have does not actually exist.” (CH-7)*

Teacher-participants indicated that the stereotyped beliefs that students have about other races/nationalities often lead to prejudiced treatment towards individuals from those particular groups. In over half of these incidents an Aboriginal student was discriminated against, and several other incidents indicated hostility towards ESL students.

*“Many of our students do not associate with the Muslim girls who wear head wear to school. These girls often seem lonely and tend to group to themselves (out of necessity). ... Rarely do our school leaders seem to associate with ‘people of other races’. ... Most of our racism is very subtle. The students for the most part do not openly say racist things. They do it in very subtle ways instead.” (CH-18)*

*“I think the ESL students at [Riverside] experience racism. I haven’t witnessed much of this first hand but have heard from other students that these ESL students are picked on” (RS-60)*

Some of these prejudices reflected stereotypes of immigrant students, however, many of the teacher-participants used discourse that reveals deep seated beliefs about who ‘belongs’ at a predominantly white school like Center High. Student prejudice led students to distance themselves from and exclude non-whites, particularly Aboriginal students:

*“The Aboriginal student was left without a partner, while there was one group of three. I asked that one of them pair up with the Aboriginal student and none of them moved...I instructed one of the girls to pair up with the First Nations student...If I could respond again to this, I would have spoken to the girls after class to get a better understanding of the reasoning behind their actions.” (CH-17)*

One of the most powerful statements made by a teacher-participant from Center High indicated that students from their school receive privileges that they are not only conscious of, but willingly protect from any perceived threats.

*“Students remain relatively silent about political issues like race and gender, but they dig their heels in when you challenge the status quo... students seem oblivious to certain issues and rather cocooned. I say ‘seem’. I believe there is a wire of tension that runs just below the surface. They have an idea of what their privileges are and they stand by them.” (CH-12)*

This teacher-participant suggests that the students attending a predominantly white middle-class school do not have to think about issues of race until their privileges are challenged, privileges that will be justified and defended on the basis of racist ideologies that continue to produce whiteness as superior and reify the status quo.

While it is clear that there is racism among the student body, teacher-participants repeatedly perceived this racism as individual acts of bigotry, rather than seeing it as a reflection of the systemic and pervasive attitudes that students receive from national discourses that denigrate Aboriginal people. This focus on individual student acts of racism implies that any forms of racism occurring in the schools are being perpetrated by the students, producing teachers as innocent bystanders, free from racial prejudice. It also fails to call into question the inequality that exists within the structures of education such as school policies, curriculum development, and epistemological and pedagogical practices.

### ***Response to student incidence of racism.***

Teacher-participants recognized racism in individual student acts of racism and explicitly reported trying to address incidents of racism among the student body. These responses often included: censuring hurtful or inappropriate language, discussing stereotypes, and counseling or supporting marginalized students. The most common response that teacher-participants had when confronted with student acts of racism was to try to educate the student on the inappropriate nature of racism:

*“With student comments, I’ve tried to always engage them in conversations about the hurtful nature of stereotyping.” (CH-6)*

*“I confronted his statement” (CH-21)*

*“I had guest speakers” (CH-1)*

*“I witnessed a student make racial comment about another student. I took him aside and asked him why he had made a comment like that. I also told him that a comment like that can hurt others around him. I asked not to refer to aboriginals in that type of manner.” (RS-66)*

While most teacher-participants indicated that they did respond when witnessing student acts of racism, there were repeated patterns throughout the surveys of teachers expressing discomfort in trying to address or understand racism, regret for not doing more, and a desire to develop skills and tools to deal with these situations:

*“In retrospect I find myself thinking that perhaps I should have opened the discussion up more. Perhaps exploring the effects of the cycle of poverty and racism as it pertains to perceptions” (CH-16)*

*“I could do a better job of speaking out more regularly” (CH-6)*

*“I still have difficulty with these types of situations.” (CH-11)*

*“In retrospect I still don’t know how I should have handled the situation.” (RS-8)*

*“Looking back I wish I had said more and re-addressed the topic in the following classes” (RS-10)*

*“I probably should have discussed it” (RS-42)*

*“I was very uncomfortable & didn’t really do anything. I should’ve done more” (RS-38)*

*“I was so appalled I almost fell over with shock...I completely froze due to the intensity of the comment. I am ashamed I did not respond to them” (RS-58)*

*“I am not sure I could have handled things any differently” (CH-19)*

*“I should have said something because it stuck with me and bothered me” (CH-25)*

The fact that these teacher-participants express such feelings of guilt and uncertainty suggests that while they may accept certain unexamined assumptions, and unquestioned cultural myths regarding both the social order and their place in it, they remain troubled by their inability to actively resist discrimination (King, 1991). Because our schools are consistently produced as race neutral places, few educators receive the opportunity to engage in professional development that would support their ability to understand and challenge racism. As a result, when teachers are faced with overt forms of racism, they lack the skills and confidence to deal with the situation. As the above statements indicate, this causes many teachers to feel inadequate in dealing with issues where race is concerned.

One of the many disturbing examples of these feelings of inadequacy came from a questionnaire written by a first year teacher who witnessed an Aboriginal student writing about their perception of racism in high school. The teacher was so uncomfortable that they simply asked the student to erase it. While the teacher-participant clearly regrets not doing more, this example is one of the many ways that racism gets silenced within the school system:

*“In my first year of teaching I had an aboriginal student write the following on his desk.*

*Most*

*Racist*

*School*

*All I did was walk up to the student and kindly ask him to erase what he put on the desk. I did not handle this very well at all. In retrospect I should have talked to the student (in private) about why he wrote what he did. I was very uncomfortable with what was on the desk.”(RS-28)*



Many minority students experience racism on a daily basis in schools, but these experiences are rarely validated by staff members who are the dominant authority figures within our educational institutions. This silencing of racism is an important strategy in constructing schools as neutral transmitters of knowledge and producing teacher identities as ‘objective’ and ‘good’.

### ***Playing the Race Card***

The third theme that appeared as a construction of innocence was the argument that students who accused teacher-participants of racist acts were *Playing the Race Card* (Dei, Karumanchery, Karumanchery-Luik, 2004). There were 25 teacher-participants from both Riverside and Center High that indicated they had been accused of racism by a student from a minority group, and in each of these cases, students were believed to be ‘playing the race card’. These accusations clearly indicate that there is a perception among racially marginalized youth that they are the targets of racial discrimination within the school and from the staff:

*“I have also had a student who as soon as you got after him about something he pulled the race card suggesting he was being singled out or picked on because he was black.” (CH-15)*

*“[I was] called a racist for suspending students or not placing them on a school team.” (CH-6)*

*“Increasingly, I notice that there is a tendency for Aboriginals to play the ‘you are a racist’ card when things don’t go their way. I find that deplorable, but understandable.” (CH-1)*

*“An aboriginal student who was confronted with smoking in an inapprop.[sic] location started in on the teacher that he was being picked on by ‘you white guys’ cause he was an Indian... [I] said no one was to be smoking here I don’t care if you were green. It’s because you shouldn’t be smoking so put it out.” (RS-14)*

*“I recall a student walking in late and being told by myself & my colleague that he should hustle and get to class. His response was ‘Are you giving me a tough time because I’m Indian.’ It appeared he was dealing the racist card ... We responded we treat every student the same, even if he were green we would hustle kids to class” (RS-33)*

The repeated use of the suggestion that students would be treated fairly ‘even if they were green’ connotes a color blindness that does not exist in our current context. Perceiving ourselves as colorblind allows white teachers to both ignore the benefits of whiteness and dismiss the experiences of people of color (McIntyre, 1997). This color blindness constructs the teacher-participant as objective and therefore incapable of racism. This concept of not ‘seeing’ race and racism was a common theme that teacher-participants referred to in various different ways:

*“I realize that I have not seen many examples of racism at [Riverside school]...but perhaps this is just the polite cotton blinders that I wear.” (RS-4)*

*“ It seems that in the last number of years at [River side school] that either I have lead a charmed life or have had blinders and ear muffs on because I have been unable to think of any examples/incidents of racism.” (RS-42)*

*“To be honest, it didn’t really click for me that these two students were of Native ancestry until they mentioned it...I also wonder – is it a good thing that I don’t recognize the ancestry of a student? Would it be better if I did?” (CH-5)*

Because racism exists, race matters. In order for us as teachers to change how racial discrimination manifests itself within the education system, we must acknowledge the particular ways that race gets taken up within the school setting. There was one teacher-participant from Riverside who indicated that they believed students of color experience so much racism that they can no longer tell the difference between traditional authoritative forms of teacher /student interactions, and racial discrimination:

*“Sometimes when I would correct this student on his behavior or classroom work he would often respond ‘It is because I am brown!’ ... I do believe ‘being brown’ does cause racism in some cases, however I believe some of these students have experienced so much of it that they use ‘because I am brown’ when it isn’t necessarily because they are brown.” (RS-9)*

While this teacher participant suggests that students of color may not always be identifying or naming racism correctly, they identify a pervasive school climate of racial discrimination that creates an atmosphere whereby students feel that this is a constant possibility. The following surveys reveal that students are very aware of the racism that exists within the school:

*“My first reaction to this question is the human rights survey conducted by my students. The results showed that the students believed our school to be quite racist.”(RS-63)*

*“Students have made general comments about white people being racist. We have talked about not lumping all people together. Often students don’t understand racism and think that any injustice against them is because they are Aboriginal.”(RS-2)*

It is interesting to note that while the following teacher-participant questionnaire indicates that students ‘play the race card’, they paradoxically argue that it is the behavior of the teachers, in the form of fair treatment, which will change the perceptions First Nations students have regarding racist incidents by the staff:

*“The one I have experienced personally is that our First Nations students often assume that teachers (who they perceive as ‘white’) are going to judge them on the basis of color. The only way to change that perception is through time and fair treatment. Eventually, that is not a card that the students will play.”(RS-35)*

Students who experienced racism inflicted by staff members were constructed as dishonest, and simply trying to escape discipline that was otherwise fair and just. This discourse negates student experiences of racism and implies teachers are incapable of racist thoughts or actions producing teachers as innocent, even in the face of accusations of racism. None of the teacher-participants that revealed they had been accused of racism raised concerns that what the student was saying may have some legitimacy. None of them indicated that they asked the student questions about their perceptions, or discussed it with the student at length, instead they assured the student and consequently themselves that they were in fact ‘color blind’, and did not *see* color (Olsson, 1996; Raby, 2004) . Racism by such accounts only exists in the school because it resides in the heads of students of color (Montgomery, 2005). For the most part, teacher-participants narrated stories of students ‘playing the race card’ as a line of defense to prove in fact that they were innocent, even in the face of accusations of racism.

### ***Telling on Each Other***

The fourth and final theme which emerged from the data that supports the construction of innocence was teacher- participants *Telling on Each Other* (Schick, 2000a). There were a total of 14 surveys from both schools where teacher- participants indicated that they had observed racism among their colleagues. The majority of these incidents occurred when a teacher made a racially insensitive remark in the company of other teachers. These comments about staff indicate that there is in fact prejudice within the staff, which disrupts the construction of teachers as neutral and objective. The stories also indicate that those teachers making the racially insensitive comments expected little opposition, and as revealed in the surveys, received none:

*“I have found that teachers ...[are] likely to make racially insensitive remarks, but those remarks are almost always made in the company of other teachers, who are considered a peer group. In other words, those teachers making racial insensitive remarks expect no oppositions and at least a quiet acceptance.” (RS-55)*

The stereotypes and racial slurs made by teachers were often couched in language that did not refer to specific racial groups, yet clearly had racial undertones. The careful way these teachers chose language to discuss racist thoughts indicates that while blatant racism may be (for the most part) unacceptable, teachers felt comfortable sharing racist beliefs as long as they used language that would leave their identities of innocence intact:

*“Teachers are also guilty of racial comments – in the staff room I have heard staff make racial slurs perhaps in a less blatant way, but damaging never the less – phrases such as ‘look at the gene pool’ or ‘it can’t be helped, look where they are coming from’.” (RS-26)*

*“Certainly at [Center High], as well as other schools, I’ve heard many staff members refer to Aboriginal peoples as ‘them’ or ‘those people’, terms that are insensitive and fraught with stereotype.” (CH-6)*

*“‘They’ need to get jobs, ‘they’ need to get off social assistance, that’s where all our money goes. We should go back to food stamps so ‘they’ don’t spend money on booze, were conversations I was not in, but heard between some people in the staff room.” (RS-64)*

Teacher-participants also expressed concern that when the school in question tried to deal with ‘cultural’ issues, many teachers reacted in a negative way, suggesting that they find topics such as this distasteful and a waste of their time:

*“When I was at [another school], some staff members would seem frustrated when told that an upcoming professional development workshop would focus on Aboriginal issues. To me this suggests racial insensitivity. I believe this insensitivity was also expressed at [Center High’s] P.D. in-service held at the [Aboriginal Cultural Center] in November.” (CH-5)*

While the impact of ‘cultural sensitivity’ training such as this has been critiqued by anti-racist scholars as having little effect on white supremacy, it is clear that this teacher-participant perceives the negative reaction of other teachers not as a form of critique, but as a form of racism.

### ***Teacher response to racism from colleagues.***

Teachers explicitly and often regretfully reported not engaging with teaching colleagues when they were faced with incidents of racism:

*“When my colleagues were showing signs of racial insensitivity, I said nothing. ... Regarding my response to my colleagues’ signs of insensitivity, I am not pleased that I suppress my feelings or opinions. However, there are some colleagues to whom I am able*

*to express my thoughts and professional opinions. It is safe. But there are others with whom I am not as comfortable.” (CH-5)*

*“They’ need to get jobs / ‘they need to get off social assistance, that’s where all our money goes .... [This was a] conversation I was not in but heard between some people in the staff room. [I] asked if they (people in conversation) ever knew anyone out of work? ... I was ignored and didn’t go any further. I wish I had probed a little further and not been shy to express my feelings on the topic.” (RS-64)*

*“[To teachers] I have responded always in the typical fashion, one of quiet acceptance – no challenge was made to the person’s remarks. My thoughts are always the same – guilt, denial, and confusion.” (RS-55)*

*“In terms of staff, I just ignore it.” (RS-26)*

While some teacher- participants admitted to observing racism among staff members, they consistently positioned themselves outside of this form of racism. Accusing colleagues of racism implicates *other* teachers within the school in forms of racism, leaving the narrator of the story as either a neutral observer, or constructing themselves as someone who is disturbed by the racist accounts of other teachers, therefore producing themselves as ‘one of the good ones’. While teachers often regretted not responding to racist incidents by their colleagues, none of them discussed the significance of their inability to do so.

### ***Impact of Teacher Perceptions of Racism***

As indicated earlier, the high school completion rate for Aboriginal students is currently much lower than that of non-Aboriginal students here in Canada. While many factors may contribute to this phenomenon, the dominant discourse in education today indicates that the majority of educators believe this to be caused by cultural determinism

and cultural deficiencies. There is little research which cites racial oppression as the major reason Aboriginal students leave school prior to completion, yet interestingly Center High teacher-participants readily acknowledged that the marginalization of Aboriginal students caused them to drop out of classes, quit teams, and leave Center High permanently.

*“I can’t remember witnessing any incidents of racism. I do know that students of Aboriginal descent often feel out of place at [Center High] because they are a distinct minority. I know of one student who is transferring to [Riverside] for that reason.” (CH-23)*

*“I have dealt with a number of Aboriginal students and parents. In some instances in my discussion I have been told for various reasons involving racism that the young person has decided to change schools.” (CH-10)*

While many Center High teacher- participants clearly identified racism as the main reason Aboriginal students dropped out of school, none of the Riverside teacher- participants discussed this possibility. It is significant to note that the teacher-participants from Center High are referring to only four students who self-identify as Aboriginal, while the administration of the Riverside school indicated that in this school year alone, an overwhelming number of approximately 500 students were removed from the school before completion. While the administration from Riverside admitted that many of these marginalized students were Aboriginal, none of the Riverside teacher-participants mentioned the impact of this phenomenon in their questionnaires. It would be difficult for educators to maintain notions of ‘racelessness’ if we acknowledged the possibility that a significant proportion of our student body do not succeed due to the pervasive climate of racial discrimination within the school.



The consistent patterning of racism that occurred throughout these questionnaires reflects a climate of hostility within both schools. While racism is not the fault of any one individual, ending racism and creating an inclusive environment is the responsibility of every individual. This means that it is necessary to confront racism when it arises, as well as reflect upon our individual assumptions and teacher practices with marginalized students:

*“I remember talking about racist attitudes in the classroom with a colleague from Jamaica in connection with To Kill a Mockingbird. What he said intrigued me – that it was better to draw out and discuss racist attitudes than to let them stay hidden.” (RS-44)*

The examples teacher-participants used in this study attest to a paradoxical phenomenon within the schools. Student incidents of racism are generally challenged immediately by staff members, yet teacher incidents of racism are met with quiet acceptance. Students who accuse teachers of racial prejudice are constructed as dishonest, and as a result teachers perceive racism as existing only in the imagination of students of color and bigots within the student body. These discourses reflect the larger systemic issues of how the school and society operates. The patterns that take place are not so much the results of malice by specific individuals, as much as a product of unquestioned common sense notions regarding racism. Teachers cannot validate student accusations of racism because this would destroy the illusion of white teacher identity as objective and good. Teachers cannot hold their colleagues accountable for racist acts because this would shatter the myth of whiteness as innocence. In the end, it was enough for teacher-participants to secretly and anonymously tell on each other as a way of distancing themselves from their racist colleagues, subsequently reproducing their *own* innocence. I

have little doubt that had I been given the same questionnaire previous to this research, I would have responded by telling on my colleagues.

The various discourses that construct whiteness as innocence are significantly common in colonial contexts, as few individuals position themselves within racial domination. As stated previously, teachers in particular are produced as, and identify themselves as objective, neutral, fair and 'good'. The problem with this type of discourse is that it fails to acknowledge white supremacy, and the fact that we have all internalized racism within this colonial context. These constructions of innocence allow us to work from a state of dysconsciousness regarding racial inequality (Kailin, 1999; King, 1991). As educators, we cannot begin to address inequalities in our system until we recognize how our own identity constructions of innocence blind us to the reality of oppression.

## CHAPTER FIVE:

### Focus Group Analysis: Turning the Gaze

*“Their voices create a cacophony and dialogic display of contradictory desires, fears, and literary tropes that, if carefully ‘read’, suggest just how slippery speaking, writing reading, and desiring subjectivity really are” (Britzman, 2000, p.28).*

The purpose of the focus group data analysis is to further understand how teacher-participants narrate and problematize race and racism using dialogue. Through multiple voices, experiences and positionalities, these teacher-participants, along with my co-researcher Tyler and I, used language that both reconstructed and disrupted the production of our identities as white teachers. The intent of this analysis is not to construct an accurate portrait of us as individuals, as our identities are multiple and shifting, but to a) understand how dialogue such as this can create a space for anti-racist anti-oppressive principles to be explored. It also allows us to b) identify the various barriers that anti-racist educators face, and c) begin to imagine how we can negotiate change within our school systems.

The focus group participants were invited to come together on their own time to further analyze the results of the questionnaires, and to discuss anti-racist anti-oppressive education. The teacher-participants in both of these focus groups clearly had a comprehensive understanding of racism, and were able to locate forms of racial inequality in the structures of our education system. The focus group participants often

questioned their own assumptions and preconceived notions, and seemed to understand that anti-racist education deconstructs our identities as educators. They did not place the responsibility for changing the situation on the Other, nor did they use rhetoric that denied or defended white privilege. While there were periodic slippages into constructions of innocence, it is clear that these teacher-participants self-selected to be part of this study as a result of their own consciousness regarding racial inequality. They identified and criticized both racist ideology and oppressive structures without falling back on liberal myths such as meritocracy. While some participants had a clearer understanding of the connection between racism and identity construction, the discussions that ensued allowed us all to rethink our notions of what it means to be an anti-racist educator.

While the topics from the focus groups' discussions varied, there were several significant themes that emerged from the data. These themes have been synthesized into two general areas of interest for us as anti-racist educators:

- 1) Identifying and deconstructing barriers to anti-racist education, and
- 2) Negotiating and imagining change in educational theory and praxis.

The first section of this chapter analyzes the numerous barriers that teacher-participants identified which make it difficult to promote authentic anti-racist anti-oppressive education. These barriers include sub-themes such as (a) the processes and practices of white teacher identity constructions, (b) how whiteness constructs the Other, and (c) the inequalities that permeate the structures of our education system. Our discussion groups tended to focus on deconstructing the various barriers that keep teachers from creating an inclusive climate within our schools.

In the second section, teacher-participants begin to imagine and negotiate change. This idea of change involved the sub-themes of both (a) creating opportunities for us as educators to transform ourselves, and (b) transformative change that is facilitated by restructuring the current system of education.

### ***Barriers to Anti-Racist Educational Theory and Practice***

We asked both focus groups to comment on their perceptions of the staff reaction to the anti-racist in-service offered as part of this research within each school. These in-services allowed teachers from both Center High and Riverside schools to view the data from the surveys, and engage in dialogue with Tyler and myself regarding our analysis of the data. The reactions were unanimous: all five of the focus group members were shocked by the anger and defensiveness of teachers both during and after the in-service:

*Midge: Many people felt the presentation on anti-racist education was... 'Preachy', and that it was directed towards them, and that it wasn't relevant to (Center High) which I found flabbergasting.*

*Tyler: So why is it not relevant to (Center High)?*

*Midge: I don't know! (laughs) I don't know why it's not relevant. That's what I asked. Well, because there aren't many Native kids here. I said it's not just about Native kids, it's about females, it's about all sorts of kids, and adults and perceptions. Well, they just didn't get that. They were very very narrow minded and short sighted.*

Midge indicated that Center High teachers reacted defensively to the survey data, and that they assumed that since their collegiate is predominantly white, racism is not an issue. White people do not view themselves as 'raced', and racial dominance is so pervasive that we often fail to understand the ways in which racism is a relation between

white people and racially Othered people. In fact, because whiteness is the center that *produces* the racialized Other, confronting whiteness among whites becomes essential to transforming societal relations. Because colonialism was a racializing practice, there are no spaces where racism does not exist.

The teacher-participants from Riverside also indicated that staff members from their schools were shocked by the survey results, and expressed their concern that in spite of the evidence, their colleagues insisted that racism was not much of a problem in their school:

*Veronica: Umm, okay. My reaction, I wasn't shocked by the results, I didn't hear anything that shocked me. I was slightly surprised by the reaction of the staff to the information that was given, I personally found it naïve to believe that racism doesn't exist or that it is not an issue in a school that has as much diversity as we do, or in any school for that matter, and so I wasn't shocked by the results but I was a little taken back by the defensiveness of some peoples' reactions...*

*Betty: ...you can't have a school this size and feel that racism is not an issue here so it shocks me when I hear people saying things like that, oh that we don't have a big problem with racism here. It floors me really, so yeah, I was shocked and disappointed.*

*Archie: Well, I guess the image that comes to my mind right away is of a bowl or a cup or whatever and when stuff gets settled on the bottom the water looks clear, but if you stir in the cup, and you guys basically stirred... but at the same time it also indicates that people want to keep it at the bottom and not in front of their premise because if you do that people have to change. And we are in a culture that basically wants to keep it as hidden as possible....*

The metaphor that Archie uses of a water glass that appears clear until it has been stirred to reveal the murk of racism is significant. It indicates that there are numerous practices which contribute to the invisible nature of racism until a research methodology

such as anti-racist education is used to dig beneath the participants' assumptions and challenge their sense of security. The Riverside participants were clearly unsettled by the survey data results from their school. The water glass metaphor Archie used suggests that racism is often silenced among educators because it threatens our sense of security. There is security in knowing who we are and what we are doing. There is security in our traditional notions of what it means to be a teacher, and disrupting this can be discomfoting. But this is not only prevalent in education, it permeates all of our institutions as part of a national discourse which suggests that racism is not a problem here in Canada (Montgomery, 2005; Willisky, 1998). All of the teacher-participants (including myself) slipped in and out of positioning ourselves outside of racist social structures, often blurring the lines between old familiar discourses, and using language that reflected an emerging consciousness to our own complicity in the dilemma of oppression.

While there were themes that re-emerged from the survey data, such as teacher-participants constructing racism as a problem primarily among the student body, the focus group discussions served as a vehicle to move us past these constructions and analyze our role in institutional and systemic racism within a white supremacist context:

*Jughead: I have been here for five years and I know racism is here but it has never seemed really really really out there – prevalent. But I'm not hanging out with the kids outside or anything so I don't know...I think that's where most of the problem lies is their [students] interactions with each other.*

*Sheelah: Well, teachers sure narrated heavily on the student to student, that's what they saw the most...but again...*

*Jughead: Because it's more blatant, it's out there, I mean our [teachers'] way is probably more subconscious and you don't realize you're doing it; you're not intentionally doing something.*

*Sheelah: It's not overt right?*

*Jughead: Right, it's very subtle.*

Initially, Jughead suggests that she does not *see* 'a lot' of racism as she is not 'hanging out' with the students, but as the discussion evolves she admits that teachers have their own form of covert racism that they may not be conscious of. Rather than reinvestigate the ways that we as teachers continue to construct our own innocence, this focus group data analysis allows us to understand how these constructions can be disrupted through dialogue.

***Impact of teacher identity constructions.***

*Sheelah: ... how can this be used in a classroom, how can educators benefit from a conversation like this one?. You know, when um people were being sort of defensive about it when they heard the information, Tyler and I were talking about it, you know we would have loved to ask questions like.. what if this were true? What does that mean for you? And I think you're right, I think that means change and that's why it's so scary.*

*Veronica: Why is this so scary?*

*Archie: I've got one word here - been there done that - I think we tend to operate on the assumption that our way of knowing is complete. That's where the fear lies because we would actually be able to hear other people speak and consider what they are saying and realize there is a void and that what we understand isn't perfect and it's a very difficult thing and it's really scary.*

*Veronica: It feels better to be right. (laughter)*

*Jughead: And aren't teachers supposed to know everything about everything?*

*Archie: Yes and it's very hard. The more you are in a position of being the supposed moral model the harder it is to have to face that.*



This excerpt, more than any other, exemplifies how contemporary ideologies and discourse create white teacher identity constructions as both above moral reproach and seemingly omnipotent. This implies that teacher identity is fashioned in precisely the way that Carol Schick (2000c) describes; the perfectly shaped form cut out of a brick wall through which we must simply mold ourselves and step through in order to become a *teacher*. The rigidity of our identity constructions as educators became an underlying theme in our focus group discussions. The production of educator discourse as ‘fixed’ and somewhat predetermined leaves us with the following dilemma: How can we disrupt the discourses which work to produce the current identity constructions of white teachers?

***Protecting white privilege.***

One of the biggest barriers to disrupting teacher identity constructions was the resistance of teachers to situate themselves inside of racial domination, and give up their privileged positions within our society. Teacher-participants felt that change was necessary in order to address issues of racial oppression in the schools, but that it would be a difficult task for many reasons. One of the most significant problems teacher-participants identified was the process of denial. Focus group participants from both schools saw teacher denial as a way to avoid thinking about these issues, and a way to protect their insulated and privileged lives:

*Veronica: So at an education level, at, as the level of an educator how do you begin to break that down or even make people aware of it? Because I think the vast majority doesn't think twice about it.*

*Betty: I think a lot of people deny it, to be honest with you.*

*Veronica: Deny it.*

*Betty: That's what I think the biggest problem is getting people to admit that such things actually exist. [laughter]*

*Betty: Because not everybody wants to recognize that, and I think a lot of people like the way their life is, and they like the...*

*Archie: The status quo.*

*Betty: Yeah. And they, to use this word, they like, they enjoy the privileges that are endowed to them. And I think getting people to first recognize that there is one thing, but then also to admit that y' know, that you kind of like being where you are, and sort of your station in life, is hard. I think that is really hard for people... to openly admit anyway.*

Each of the focus group participants revealed their belief that while white people may recognize the advantages they inherit in a white supremacist context, their inability to admit to it comes from their desire to protect and enjoy the privileges that have been bestowed upon them, while maintaining identities of goodness and innocence:

*Tyler: Well, it is a touchy subject, and I think it is, when you recognize that it is all of us, it also means that we're a part of it. If you're not willing to do something about it that can be threatening, or if you're comfortable with the way things are...*

*Midge: Or you don't want to admit what you're thinking and that you're ok with everything.*

### ***White privilege and white guilt.***

As this excerpt between Tyler and Midge indicates, discussing white supremacy among white people often evokes feelings of anxiety. As white people we are taught to justify our privilege through the belief in our innate superiority. When these systems of privilege are questioned, the transparency of the discourses which produced our identity is revealed. Revelations such as these produce feelings of shame, guilt and uncertainty in

a people whose racialization status creates immeasurable benefits for some at the expense of others.

While no one in the focus group denied that white privilege exists, Veronica did ask for a specific definition of what white privilege meant. The other focus group participants clarified this term by sharing their own understanding of white privilege, stating that white people are “*privy to privileges and assumptions that a lot of people aren’t*”, “*that people will look at you a certain way and treat you a certain way*”, and that “*you acquire expectations about what you will do with your life because of it as well*”.

Archie was the first focus group participant to discuss white privilege. He identified a relationship between the production of white ‘success’, particularly in schools, with the co-construction of Aboriginal people as dysfunctional and incapable of succeeding. These binary constructions are important in defining not only who we are as white people, but also who we are *not*:

*Archie: But there is, there is such a thing as white privilege you know it’s almost like built into the genes of the society. But if you are a particular type of child born in a particular type of situation you are going to be going to school and you are going to pass and you are going to reach for university. It’s just...*

*Veronica: It’s understood*

*Archie: It’s the same as some of the things that are understood about native people, is that they are alcoholics they’re drunks, they have, they’re abusive, they can’t handle anything - that seems to be the cumulative image.*

There is a long history of discourses which produce Aboriginal people as inferior to whites. These constructions provide teachers with myths and stereotypes that determine how we think about the issues that Aboriginal people face, and how we determine the

solutions that are sought. In these scenarios, the Other is believed to be the problem, and the solution lies in ‘helping’, ‘understanding’ and ‘changing’ the Other. These binary constructions also help to maintain our belief in meritocracy and white superiority: While whites are civilized and successful, Aboriginals in comparison are uncivilized and dysfunctional. These discourses are significant as they reinforce myths which allow us to justify a system of racial domination.

When Tyler asked if white privilege was discussed among staff members at Riverside school, this was the response:

*Jughead: It is not generally talked about, it's, in some places it's kind of, well it's known, but it's not, 'hey yeah'.  
(laughter)*

*Jughead: I think it's more, shhhhhh.  
( laughter)*

Here, Jughead speaks to the underlying issue of the silencing of racism by dominant groups. While Jughead believes some teachers *know* that white privilege exists, she indicates that they prefer not to talk about it overtly, even placing her finger to her lips as she says ‘shhhhhhh’, suggesting that teachers consciously keep it quiet. While there are many possible reasons that teachers would not want to acknowledge or discuss white privilege, one of the most obvious barriers is the issue of white guilt:

*Veronica: I think a big part of that is we treat, we the collective white society treat Aboriginal people like children because, and so it's that, like y'know when you say it's a white, like I think of - um - when they first came over it was like okay we need to put them on reservations and we'll take care of them because, they just don't know as much... they're not as educated as us...*

*Jughead: Civilized.*

*Veronica: They are not as civilized as us and I think a culture of treating them like children came about where we, we...*

*<Laughter>*

*Veronica: I am feeling really guilty all the sudden.*

*<Laughter>*

The defensiveness, denial and anger that often accompany discussions about whiteness are typical ways for us as white people to hide from our own complicity in racial domination. When Veronica states that she is feeling guilty, she uses a tone of exasperation, and exaggerates her facial expressions and body movements, causing a trickle of laughter as she animates her sense of self disgust. The laughter that was heard during these discussions was often tentative and nervous, and served to break the tension that was building in the room. Much like Veronica, when we as white people begin to understand how the history of racial oppression continues to manifest itself in privilege and domination, we are stung by the recognition that *we* are the problem and that we benefit from the suffering endured by racial Others. When we begin to acknowledge the violence that oppressed groups have endured in order for us to live lives of privilege, the guilt becomes overwhelming, and so it should be. The problem of alleviating white guilt is often one of the main barriers that anti-racist theorists face regarding radical transformation in education and other areas.

***The production of the other.***

The notion of Aboriginal people as ‘uncivilized’, as Veronica previously stated, has worked to justify the paternalistic treatment of Aboriginal people through policies and enactments which are discriminatory and oppressive such as the *Indian Act*, the reserve system, and residential schools. While Canada has had a long history of discourses which continue to reproduce the civilized/savagery binary which both Jughead and Veronica allude to, the focus group participants revealed how racist ideologies about Aboriginal people and people of color as ‘uncivilized’ continues to permeate our education systems:

*Sheelah: Why do you think they already have those preconceived notions in grade 9 ‘civilization’ and ‘uncivilized’ and the primitive or uncivilized they immediately associate with people of color?*

*Midge: Yeah.*

*Sheelah: Where is that built? Where is that created?*

*Midge: Years of misunderstanding and misconceptions. But some of it might be the newspaper, the magazines, the books that they read. When you look at the Roots of Society...*

*Sheelah: The curriculum?*

*Midge: Yeah. (laughter) I mean the old textbook they would show, you know if you want to go into sexism, they would show naked women. They would show the women’s breasts, but in a submissive kind of, taking care of kind of way.*

*Sheelah: But certainly not white women’s breasts.*

*Midge: No, no not usually, that’s true. And they wouldn’t necessarily talk about the importance of gathering, which was maybe more important than hunting, right? That they may have lived off the berries and the roots more often than the sporadic buffalo, or you know, Mammoth in Europe right? So...*

Midge reveals that our school curriculum and textbooks often reinforce images of people of color as savages, and that women of color in particular are often objectified and portrayed in sexual and submissive ways. It is important to understand how this

objectification and dehumanization works to justify the violence inflicted on people of color, as well as to differentiate them from white society and our 'norms'. These constructions create rhetoric which seek to explain why '*they* can not make it', 'why *they* do not deserve it', and generally puts the onus back on the group being oppressed to transform. These explanations are often referred to as 'blaming the victim', which focuses attention on the Other as the cause of their own inequalities, rather than the reality of historical oppressions ( Dei, Karmanchery, Karmanchery-luik; 2005; St. Denis; 2004).

***The construction of sameness versus difference.***

This discourse of difference became a topic of contention several times in our focus group discussions, as it was challenged by two of the focus group participants in the following excerpts.

*Tyler: So what makes this interesting to you?*

*Midge: Well, I was raised in a (city name) which is a very racist city....and I just never bought into it as a kid...I worked in a gas station where we saw all sorts of, you know, everybody in town. There were only three or four gas stations and the one that was used there was used quite a lot by the (name of reserve) band and a taxi would go between the (name of reserve) and there, and you saw all sorts of people and you realized , you know, so that 57 year old woman is just like my mother. You know, that 17 year old kid is just like me and you know...*

*Tyler: Just picking up on one of the things you said there, ah you sort of indicated, they're like my mother, do you think there is something in recognizing people as human and similar, as opposed to...there has been a lot of it in education on cultural difference.*

*Midge: Well, I think that is important. I don't think we do that enough, to just see people as human.*

While it is clearly important to understand the historical, social, political and economic reasons that groups which are Othered continue to struggle for justice and freedom, seeing people as ‘similar’ and human was seen as a solution that was discussed in both focus groups:

*Veronica: Because in every case their reality is so completely different than mine...it's a completely different world...*

*Tyler: Yeah.*

*Betty: And yet at the same time there are so many things that are the same, like y'know what I mean.*

*Sheelah: Yeah.*

*Betty: Like I'll have kids in my class, y'know First Nations or not, and they're, y'know, depending on the writing assignment, writing about their families and I'm just thinking to myself “ this is my family, I see things in my family...I think it's great that we want to understand the differences but I think we have to recognize too just how many similarities there are...that culture, that family, that child, that person, is the same as me... we tend to say – this is different and therefore I must understand it...rather than looking at it even from a human perspective.*

*Sheelah: I read a quote that says the only difference between us is the way we are treated, and I believe that.*

While it is clear that we must acknowledge the differences that occur between individuals and groups due to their histories, life experiences and identities, these focus group participants saw the danger in a discourse of ‘difference’ regarding Aboriginal people. It is in the nature of our binary language system to produce ideologies that exist within a hierarchy of values, which means that the word *difference* has negative connotations. In other words, if Aboriginal people are different, who or what are they different from? This discourse produces whiteness as the center or ‘norm’, to which



everything else is deemed inferior. It essentializes both whites and Aboriginals, and ignores the complexities within group identity constructions. As stated previously, terms such as ‘them’ or ‘those people’ which are often used to identify the Other work to maintain the idea of difference as something innately inferior. As educators, understanding how the impact of our histories divides us, while focusing on how students, families and communities are similar may allow us to circumvent these destructive belief systems.

### ***Cultural determinism versus racism.***

The focus in education on cultural determinism, or the idea that lack of traditional ‘culture’ creates a barrier for Aboriginal youth is clearly problematic. While cultural revitalization is thought to be the panacea for the issues facing Aboriginal students in education today, there is still some question as to how the introduction of culture will address the economic, social and political inequalities First Nations and Métis youth are currently facing (McConaghy, 2002; St. Denis, 2004). The current discourses many educators use to explain the gap in Aboriginal educational completion rates include the belief that Aboriginal students struggle in school *because* they are culturally different, while arguing that assimilation has been a barrier that can be overcome through cultural revitalization (St. Denis, 2004). Although these ideologies of difference are no longer grounded in biological constructions of race, they are maintained by romanticized or stereotypical versions of the cultural Other.

*Sheelah: No. People prefer to talk about culture rather than racism, it's more comfortable.*

*Archie: And even on the level of culture we all, we'll say, "aren't powwow's nice", and that's an indication that we're not racist.*

*Archie: ...wouldn't people say here that there is a certain amount of stuff that goes on that, for example, comparative religions, looking at different, multiculturalism. Isn't there a certain amount in the curriculum?*

*Veronica: I think that there is a lot of curricular awareness but I don't think that necessarily battles the racism. I think that they are kind of parallel but I don't think they're necessarily one in the same. A lot of stuff dealing with cultural diversity, cultural awareness, different religions, world religions, but that doesn't necessarily, I find, address racism...*

While cultural revitalization and multiculturalism can be productive in their ability to disrupt negative constructions of Aboriginal identity and resist whiteness, it may also work to paradoxically essentialize Aboriginal people (St. Denis, 2004). It centers on the problematic discourse of *difference*, and also allows us as educators to turn attention away from ourselves and focus once again on the Other. If we focus on Aboriginal culture, then we do not have to talk about racial discrimination, oppression, or white privilege. "A discourse of cultural difference has been quite effective in minimizing and discounting the effects of racialization and racial discrimination in Aboriginal education"(St. Denis & Hampton, 2002, p.31).

As Veronica stated, dealing with cultural diversity and cultural awareness does not necessarily address racism. In the following excerpt Midge, Tyler and I discuss the difference between focusing on 'cultural differences' and understanding racial oppression:

*Sheelah: I know in ten years at (west side school) we never once talked about racism, as a staff.*

*Midge: Really?*

*Sheelah: Not once.*

*Midge: Oh, see at (another west side school) that was quite common.*

*Sheelah: We talked about culture.*

*Midge: Oh, ok.*

*Sheelah: We talked about culture, we didn't talk about racism.*

*Midge: Oh, well, racism was that ugly little thing that was kind of left at the end.*

*Sheelah: So, do you think at (west side school) you talked more about culture or...*

*Midge: Well, yeah probably. And to me talking about that is also bringing up the issues that are around.*

*Tyler: So what kind of, when we talk about culture is it talking about culture in sort of a pow wow type of setting or is it also bringing up issues of poverty and..*

*Midge: Umm, I think it was more the issues.*

*Tyler: No I mean, it's sort of out of curiosity because I think sometimes some people call it the culturalization of poverty. You know, that things can become the culture that they come from and live in, as opposed to understanding what kind of systems might be involved in producing them...*

Tyler makes the distinction between Aboriginal traditional culture, and the issues that Aboriginal people face due to a history of colonial oppression. Midge indicates that for her, discussing Aboriginal culture as a staff meant 'bringing up the issues'. Teachers associate Aboriginal culture with the 'issues' that Aboriginal people face because of the dominant discourses which reinforce the belief that Aboriginal people face issues such as poverty because of *cultural differences*. Because the effects of colonization are so rarely acknowledged or explored, the Canadian public has begun to associate these issues with the 'culture' of Aboriginal people, rather than the outcomes of oppression. When Midge says, "*I think it was more the issues*", she is merely responding to the common sense

notions that are being perpetuated within our society today. As educators, we must be aware of the issues Aboriginal people are facing, without ignoring the historical processes which contributed to the current material and social outcomes. Discussing the ‘issues’ without understanding what caused them reinforces the historical amnesia that white supremacy is built on.

***The culture of poverty.***

Both Tyler and Betty went on to discuss what they referred to as the ‘culture of poverty’ and how this may affect the student body. While there is a body of research on the socio-economic status of African American people which is called, *the culture of poverty*, these focus group participants are referring to the daily impact of living with low socio-economic status, along with the poor bashing that continues to permeate Canadian society and consequently, our schools. In the following excerpt, Betty indicates that she feels poverty has a much bigger impact on her students than traditional cultural differences or ethnicity:

*Betty: That’s what I wanted to say too was that, again I don’t think it has anything to do with the value of education because I think all families want their children to be successful and want them to learn. But I think sometimes, and unfortunately, um predominantly probably within our Aboriginal um community, there is a different culture. There is another culture that is going on there too. I think there is sometimes the culture of poverty that we are experiencing, so that we have kids that are living in not great conditions, and this is true of any student regardless of their color, but when you are living in a culture of poverty it is very difficult at times to make school a priority, no matter how welcoming it is ...*

*Tyler: And I think often, y’know, we don’t remember that side and we also, we remember. “oh, look those people live in poverty”, but we forget the violence that happened to those people*

*Archie: Ummhmm*

*Tyler: That resulted in their living in poverty.*

As our discussion moved from analyzing schools into broader socio-economic issues such as poverty, the focus group participants expressed their feelings of powerlessness at addressing social issues adequately within the school system. Betty believes the ‘culture of poverty’ creates barriers for students that cannot necessarily be overcome by attempts to create anti-racist anti-oppressive schools. While issues such as poverty clearly affect our student body, the powerful belief that schools are ‘the great equalizer’ becomes reduced to mere rhetoric by educators who use familial and social issues to justify inequities in our school systems (Willinsky, 1998). While the social ills created by colonialism can not necessarily be resolved within the education system, many of the common sense notions about poverty get perpetuated in institutions such as schools, rather than disrupted.

***The shame of poverty.***

As Tyler indicated in the previous excerpt, there is a need for us as educators to understand the history of oppression which created the poverty and social issues facing many of our students. The focus group participants indicated that this culture of poverty was often something that was stigmatized and ‘hidden’ among our school systems. Our liberal belief in meritocracy constructs individuals and families living in poverty as lacking the integrity to ‘work hard’ and ‘make the right choices’. These ideologies and assumptions mean that rather than receiving support and the necessary resources, students

and families who come from poverty are often marginalized within our education systems.

*Betty: Poverty for most students is a quiet problem and even when you are trying to deal with it, it is very quiet. It's very um, there isn't a lot of information that is always given out of respect for not only that student but for their family as well.*

*Sheelah: Do you think that, do you think the stigma is because the assumption is that, um, that their family is living in poverty because they don't work hard enough?*

*Veronica: For sure.*

*Sheelah: They haven't made the right choices, they haven't done what needs to be done. Do you think that that is some of it? Because why the, why the, y'know.*

*Veronica: The shame*

*Sheelah: Yeah. Why?*

*Veronica: Because I think for exactly those reasons you stated. There is a stigma attached that your parents obviously aren't getting a job, you're probably living on social assistance, you know there is that aspect. Lazy, doesn't care, there's that whole... And I think with, to put it in that Aboriginal context there's a general, like a general bias about Aboriginals, like when the poverty is there amongst the Aboriginals then that conclusion is jumped to even quicker...*

*Betty: Yes.*

*Veronica: Y'know like...*

*Jughead: Umhmm*

*Veronica: Obviously the parents aren't home, aren't supportive...*

*Jughead: Umhmm. What are they doing, drinking all the money away?*

The focus group participants are indicating once again that the myths and stereotypes created about Aboriginal people affect the way we as teachers judge the families and communities that our students come from. The travesty of blaming Aboriginal people for

their own poverty has been a recurring theme within Canadian discourse (Larocque, 1991; St. Denis, 2004). This means that families facing issues of poverty entrust their children to an education system that will ultimately reproduce them as inferior. These belief systems are a pervasive barrier to building authentic anti-racist anti-oppressive education. The issue of poverty, rather than being 'hidden', must be understood and analyzed by educators and communities in order to change, not only the way we think about poverty, but how we address it within our classrooms and our schools. As educators, we need to further explore the implications of poverty as a structural element of the global economy. Rather than viewing poverty as a deficiency, we should be focusing on how practices of domination can be transformed within our education systems and beyond.

***National discourse as choice.***

While it is clear that teachers, like other Canadians, are schooled in the discourses which justify white domination, there remained a general view by all of the focus group participants that many of us as teachers make conscious choices that continue to reproduce the status quo. As anti-racist educators, our opportunities to become change agents come from our ability to understand and critique the current system with our students, and further educate ourselves and others on the impact of colonization:

*Sheelah: It's like there is this glorification of colonialism that teachers have been sort of, particularly history teachers have been sort of produced to pass on and any critique of that, any deconstruction of that, they become very very uncomfortable.*

*Midge: That concerns me that history teachers feel that way, but I do see some of that.*

*Sheelah: Do you? Like in what ways? In what ways do you see it?*

*Midge: Well, in what we might choose to teach or not to teach. You know, how are you going to teach Louis Riel? you know...*

*Sheelah: Right.*

*Midge: How are you going to teach the treaties? Are you even going to teach the treaties?*

*Sheelah: Because you can choose not to.*

*Midge: And when you choose not to, you're making a conscious decision.*

As Midge indicates, when teachers choose to ignore these issues, we are making a conscious decision. Ultimately, the ways in which we as educators value anti-oppressive education will determine not only how our students are treated, but what we choose to teach, and how we choose to teach it.

### ***Imagining and Negotiating Change in Educational Theory and Practice***

Each of these focus group participants began to discuss not only the need for change, but what needed to happen in order for that change to occur. Each of us involved in the focus group discussions expressed the fact that these sessions in and of themselves felt both liberating and empowering as we were given an opportunity to identify and deconstruct the fears and barriers to anti-racist anti-oppressive education in a safe and supportive environment. This deconstruction of our own identities and of the discourses that pervade our school system allowed us to think about what needed to be done in order to build an inclusive environment for our staff, students, parents and community members. It also gave us the opportunity to use language that is not part of the dominant



discourse among educators, and reveal how this language affects our understanding of the problem, and the possible solutions.

These discussions were so powerful because, as stated in the following excerpt, teachers were given ‘permission’ to talk about a subject that is considered to be taboo in most educational centers:

*Sheelah: There is a theme that keeps coming up, like you were talking about the settlement at the bottom of the glass, and themes keep coming up about people not wanting to deal with this, not wanting to talk about it and it being a taboo subject. What’s the fear do you think?*

*Jughead: Probably in acknowledging their own preconceived ideas that they don’t want to acknowledge they have. You know, I look at myself as somebody who I welcome everybody, no matter where you’re from or what you do, whatever I don’t look at you because of skin or religion or crap people are just people to me but if I felt I had preconceived notions I would look down more on myself so that would be harder.*

*Tyler: So there’s something when we recognize it in an institution and widespread in society, it means that when we start acknowledging it we can’t avoid being implicated in it.*

*Veronica: Absolutely. And...*

*Archie: I also wonder if it’s about permission. Permission to talk about the students and racism. Permission is the value of the school and it isn’t a value of the school that we have permission to talk about this as professionals, educators. We have permission here.*

*Sheelah: Right.*

*Archie: But we haven’t been given permission as a school. It has to be part of our culture. It has to be part of the process.*

Archie argues that in order for anti-racist anti-oppressive education to be used by educators, it must become a value of the school system, and become part of the ‘culture’ or every day process within the school. The majority of the research done in this area has

also stressed the need for educators to be given the time, support and resources to work through these issues as part of their professional practice. While there was no question as to *whether* anti-racist education should be a value within every school, there was some question as to *how* this could be implemented, given the various barriers that were previously identified.

***Beginning with dialogue: The relevance for schools.***

Much like Archie, Midge also felt that the first necessary step in creating anti-racist anti-oppressive education would be facilitating dialogue between educators. These discussions must include a critique of the existing discourses and structures of dominance within the education system rather than simply reifying old notions of white supremacy. Anti-racist educator Kevin Kumashiro (2002) argues that educators have developed education for the Other, and education about the Other, but anti-racist education must focus on the critique of privilege and dominance. The focus on analyzing privilege and dominance will lead us to the final stage of anti-racist education, which is education that changes students and society. As stated previously, these discussions are just as significant at schools that are predominantly white, as they are for schools that are more diverse.

*Tyler: I mean I think one of the interesting things is that there are people who have talked about that specific, how do you convince people to be anti-racist in white areas, because it's a tough spot, because it's like, oh, it's not damaging anybody here...and it seems like we've neglected to understand that racism is actually a relation between white people and racially Othered people, between white people and Aboriginal people here in Saskatchewan.*

*Tyler: But we all learn to grow up with certain ideas of race whether or not there's an Aboriginal person in the room. And at some point we're going to have to relate, so at*

*some point I think we're going to have to for everybody to have that awareness for us to have a broader sense of ...more inclusive.*

*Midge: And a dialogue.*

*Tyler: Yeah a dialogue.*

It is clear that in order for us as educators to implement authentic anti-racist education, we must believe in what we are doing. As Midge and I discuss in the following excerpt, building consciousness in teachers is the key. Midge suggests that our professional development days could be used to implement strategies for anti-racist anti-oppressive education. While I suggested that this must happen at the 'grass roots' level, suggesting teachers must take ownership and become leaders in this area, Midge felt that we also need support from our school boards, along with the funding and resources to implement strategies that would substantiate change. As Midge states, everyone at every level must be involved:

*Sheelah: ...if teachers don't think it's important, then what's the point in giving them the resources. It's just like they're building all this stuff to put in the curriculum, but like you said, lots of them just choose not to do it. So does building consciousness in teachers have to come before all the work and money and time that happen into creating resources. Do you know what I mean?*

*Midge: Yeah. Now could our PD days be of any use in that regard, or...institute and convention. Although, as you say, I remember a couple of years ago I think at (school name) Institute and Convention, what was that we were talking about? I think it was talking about Parliament, yeah, so she had been to Ottawa on some trip or whatever and she was talking about our government and these opportunities and whatnot and there were three people in the room that day, so you know, and you've said yourself that a lot of times you'll have had Aboriginal teachers, Aboriginal people in a room, not necessarily ...*

*Sheelah: ...the people who need it. But I think you're right, it has to be grass roots, because if teachers don't buy in it's not going to happen. It's just that simple. Administration can do things to support it, giving half days like the day that Tyler and I*

*came in, without the PD committee and without the principal here that would have never happened.*

*Midge: No. No. But there needs to be support from downtown as well, because they don't necessarily put their money where their mouth is... so it does come down to funding as well, and everybody at every level has to be involved.*

### ***Getting involved in anti-racist education.***

Many of our school systems are addressing issues of inequality in education through discourses of cultural determinism. One of the reasons that this solution becomes problematic is that the large majority of the teaching profession is white. While cultural revitalization can be a significant form of resistance to whiteness, the focus on its implementation means that the majority of the teaching force will be ill equipped as white people to teach Aboriginal culture. In contrast to this, anti-racist education is focused on rethinking our own positionalities, and questioning our own assumptions.

*Sheelah: I think there are a lot of white teachers who don't feel connected when we're talking about Aboriginal culture. I think you can easily become connected when we talk about anti-racist anti-oppressive education.*

*Tyler: I mean, it struck me in it's simplicity in really grabbing the core of it, the three principles of anti-racist education are first, you know, that we have these constructed differences that come to have real meaning, and how life...that's got to be our first principle, we need to start looking at how that happens and start challenging, our second principle is that that happens not just on the basis of race, but also on gender, ability, and sexuality.*

*Sheelah: Absolutely, class...*

*Tyler: Class, and we need to look at how all of those connect, and not just say, oh we'll solve racism and that will be the end of it, but look at all of them, that these systems are not just about disadvantage, but advantage. We need to call into question, you know, when race is produced, also how is whiteness produced?*

As Tyler contends, anti-racist education can be used as a key to unlock the interrelatedness of these various oppressions that work to marginalize certain groups within our society, and individual students within our schools. If we can begin to look at ourselves (teachers) as possible variables in the systemic racism that exist in our schools, we can possibly begin to unravel some of the ways that colonialism continues to weave its way through our educational institutions allowing white privilege to remain intact.

***Examining white privilege.***

In the last focus group session our discussion of white privilege prompted Betty to question what affect this must have on Aboriginal students coming into the system of education. If we as white educators can begin to understand (in a limited way) how pervasive whiteness is, Betty questions what it must be like to examine and experience white privilege from a First Nations perspective:

*Betty: I wonder too if we have to be sensitive to the fact that people who are, y'know, born on reserves, and people that are coming into this sort of , I don't know what you call it, but this idea of education, coming into it and having to deal with white privilege, how sensitive are we to that realization that these are people who are trying sometimes to fit into this mold and what our expectations have become and I think even just trying to wrap your own brain around the fact that understanding white privilege from a white perspective...*

*Betty: And trying to understand it from a First Nations perspective would be so different.*

*Jughead: Oh yeah.*

*Veronica: Absolutely.*

*Archie: We would have to really examine how privileged our life is and really be willing to give that up, because you can't get, you can't have someone being treated as equal without them having equal voice, and that is really hard for us. I mean, and so that process has to be done in a - in a great deal of understanding has to, y'know you can't erase the past, but how can we build a future for everyone?*

In the end, Archie reveals that one of the first solutions to creating anti-racist education is not only examining white privilege, but to validate people of color as equals with equal power and equal voice. This means equal participation of Aboriginal communities at every level of decision making in education, from hiring practices, to the creation and implementation of policies regarding pedagogical practices, curriculum development, assessment and evaluation, and identifying appropriate resources. As white educators, we have to be willing to share this power, and while we can not erase the past, the following section reveals that teacher-participants believe that acknowledging and validating our history of oppression towards Aboriginal people in this country is a step towards building a future for everyone.

### ***Validating a history of oppression.***

Initially, the focus group participants begin to narrate their concerns regarding the anger and bitterness that Aboriginal students sometimes display towards white teachers for both past and present injustices inflicted upon Aboriginal people. While the participants felt this anger was justified, they hesitantly chose language that would convey their belief that this anger was somewhat futile. It was clear that they felt inadequate to address the issue of retribution for a history of injustice. It is Betty who articulates the idea that these past and present injustices have never really been acknowledged or validated by Canadians, which fosters the resentment that our teacher

participants identified. The liberal discourses of 'innocence', 'meritocracy', and 'colorblindness' that dominate Canadian society today ensure that the issue of acknowledgment remains unresolved (Henry et al, 1995):

*Veronica: Yeah, there's a lot of pain there and a lot of, um, bitterness towards what has happened in the past. And so that creates an- us and them- as well, because you did this to us...*

*Archie: Umhmm*

*Veronica: As well, like, like I kinda hear in, in some of my students, and probably fair enough, but also it doesn't help to, to make, okay how are we going to deal with this?*

*Betty: What I wonder too, like, at some times we often, y'know we're all saying like we can't forget about or we can't change the past, and I agree with that, but at the same time we still have to really acknowledge it - that it happened.*

*Veronica: Yes*

*Tyler: Yeah*

*Jughead: Umhmm*

*Archie: Yeah exactly*

*Betty: And I think that some times there isn't, there isn't full recognition of what really happened and how people truly feel. We tend to say, "Okay, you feel that way but where are we moving from there? It's not, it's not a real acknowledgement of what that really means.*

*Jughead: Umhmm*

*Archie: Umhmm*

*Betty: Y'know what I mean? And I, and I wonder sometimes if that doesn't, I mean even if you think from your perspective when people don't validate how you feel ...*

*Jughead: Oh absolutely*

*Archie: Umhmm*

*Betty: Or why you feel the way you do, then you tend to feel like well then, why, why are we?*

*Jughead: Why should I work with you?*

*Betty: Why should I, yeah, why should I try to?*

*Archie: You're not willing really to listen.*

These focus group participants recognized that in order for us to decolonize our schools and deconstruct white supremacy, we must legitimately acknowledge the history of oppression here in Canada, and try to understand the impact it has had and continues to have on Aboriginal people today. Analyzing our history also allows us to question the hegemonic constructions which pervade our education systems.

***Hegemonic constructions of success.***

*Archie: Well, I think there is also an assumption that what we put forth as what's right and best, it's sort of almost a bit of an assumption that that's what's best for everyone.*

While the focus group participants did not specifically discuss the literary canons, or the ways in which certain forms of knowledge and education are valued over others, there was much discussion about the assumptions and values that we as educators maintain. One of the aspects of reifying the status quo is to reproduce the 'normative' images and ideas to which everyone must aspire. This fixes whiteness as the center for which everything else must be compared, and produces the marginalization of anything that cannot be incorporated:

*Veronica: ...like just thinking about our assumptions being from a white privileged standpoint of what kids should do, where they should be headed, what their goals should be, and y'know where they should go in life...I try to balance between sensitivity to how y'know, we are judging them, what is ok for them and ok for us, and that whole y'know,*



*why is our model of what is success supposed to be imposed on them. And I try to balance that with the issues that are in the First Nations communities and on reserves.*

*Tyler: I also think it comes down to, I mean not to sort of demonize people and say oh, they want to live in poverty, that's their goal, it's about what they see as realistic for them in the world...do you see that as a realistic goal for success?*

*Veronica: My head is whirling right now...completely rethinking my definition of what is 'good' or 'successful' in our community, and in the way our community is structured...*

*Sheelah: Because it has been constructed...our ideas have been constructed...and to deconstruct those ideas is a difficult thing for people...*

*Sheelah: But I like what you say about placing values on these things, y'know the 'goodness', the construction of what is good...I was thinking about what you said about some Aboriginal students wanting to go home to family for various different reasons and missing chunks of school and teachers being livid about it and thinking they should fail because of it, and I thought about the [hockey players] that I have taught in the past...and how they miss huge amounts of time...and that is considered something that is more valued than a student wanting to go home and be with their family during a crisis, or when they're lonely and feeling alone in the city...*

As educators, our ideals are often built on white middle-class values and white notions of success (Kailin, 2002; McIntyre, 1997; Schick, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c). Veronica reveals that her head is 'whirling' as she begins to see the assumptions we make on a daily basis about what is deemed 'good' and how we define 'success'. Many individuals and communities become marginalized by these constructions as they either can not or possibly choose not to uphold white middle-class values. These constructions affect whose knowledge we as educators' value, which pedagogical practices we choose to use, and how we assess and evaluate our students. The example that I share with the focus group participants of how absenteeism is acceptable for hockey players within our system, but not acceptable for Aboriginal students who are returning to reserves to be with family for various reasons, allowed the other focus group members to examine

similar examples of how our values shape and construct what happens within our education systems. For instance, students involved in extra-curricular activities such as student government or athletics are given immeasurable allowances in terms of their attendance and extensions on assignments that other students who require the same flexibility do not receive because the purpose for the necessity is devalued. As the discussion progressed, we no longer saw ourselves as objective, but as part of an institution which reproduces the status quo by enforcing white middle-class values on our students on a daily basis.

***Challenging the structure of the system.***

As Archie suggests, educators and scholars often perceive their role in the system of education as inflexible, yet he sees spaces where educators can make changes to their own policies and practices, which often reflect the illusion of rigidity. The education system is constructed by the beliefs and ideals, curriculum and practices, rules and policies created by individuals, and various forms of flexibility can be crafted and implemented by educators within the system:

*Archie: And the assumption tends to be that the system is made of stone, and the students need to find a place within the system... Y'know maybe we can plan, say ok at the beginning of the year I'm gonna plan for these types of situations cause they happen, now what can I do? And do some brainstorming about it...so you change the system rather...I think we tend to think of the system as unchangeable and unmovable.*

The focus group participants went on to discuss a few examples of practices which have been changed to meet the needs of individuals or groups who do not 'fit in' to the current structures. Programs such as extension classes, on-line learning, and the effort to

create inclusive curriculum are attempts to alter traditional modes of epistemological and pedagogical theory and practice to meet the needs of a diverse student body. What has come to be known as alternative programming in education provides an example of the flexibility that teachers can utilize.

As the discussion of educational policies and practices continued, Tyler shared an example of a period in his life when he chose to leave school without notice, but upon his return the privilege he received as a white middle-class male, and the value placed on his reason for leaving (academic pursuits) meant he had support from his teachers and the institution. Reflecting upon these past experiences, Tyler has this insight to share with our focus group:

*Tyler: ...maybe we are not willing to give those people the benefit of the doubt so there's a question of when we see flexibility in the system, so we are able to build it in for the hockey players. We are able to build it in for y'know the kind of academic students or the ones we sort of see a bit of ourselves in.*

The focus group participants come to realize that flexibility can be built into the education system, but often only for those with power and privilege, who are constructed as having value and worth within the system. Veronica immediately connects this with her own white privilege:

*Veronica: Absolutely. Yeah, the more I think about that whole thing of white privilege I think of how many situations I have walked into and been given the benefit of the doubt, full trust, like given so many privileges simply before I've opened my mouth because of how I present myself. The fact that I'm white.*

The 'structure' of our school systems in actuality is as rigid or as flexible as the ideals and the practices of the educators creating them. Educators often provide flexibility

when, as Tyler aptly states, we value the purpose for the change. The most significant issue for us as white educators then, is to question the ways in which our own values come into play when using policies and practices that ultimately affect our students on a daily basis.

***Does anti-racism change your perceptions of education?***

One of the key questions that we need to ask ourselves as researchers and as educators is, how can anti-racist education change our ideas about how society is organized, how schools are created, and how we perceive both our students and ourselves as educators? The focus group participant answers to this difficult question were encouraging. Each of the participants indicated that anti-racist theory had a significant impact on how they perceived themselves as educators, and how their own identity constructions and belief systems inform their own pedagogical theory and practice:

*Tyler: Yeah, and I think that, you know, in some ways this discussion here we were hoping to do something similar, I mean I think carrying on from Archie's metaphor, I wonder about the question, a lot of people want to keep the sludge down but what if we unsettle that and start talking about racism does it change the way, do you feel like it changes the way we see the school or does it change the way we see the classroom?*

*Veronica: For me personally I find it changes, it makes me think more about my interactions and my behaviors, and is there places where I can improve in that way and the answer's got to be yes I mean there's, I'm not walking into there as a, I mean again and it gets back to that whole discussion we had that day about how we all have our own paradigms we all have ways we see the world and so I find a discussion like this doesn't make me look at the world a different way, it makes me look at myself my classroom, how I teach how I interact, do I treat students of a different nationality than me a different way? and if so, how? and how is that making them feel? So it makes, in that way I can see where people get uncomfortable. For me it makes me question where my own prejudices and my own stereotypes lie and that's tough to examine because...*

*Sheelah: Because everybody has them and it's hard to say that you do.*

*Veronica: yeah exactly, cause you want to think that you're letting students walking into the classroom judgment free and everybody is a clean slate you have no preconceived notions and when I started looking at data and really started thinking about it, yeah I've got preconceived notions and how can I change that about, so that my students walk in and they don't feel it you know even if I can't completely change it how do I teach that they're not feeling it as much, at least.*

*Tyler: So one of the questions, and I think you really brought us onto this, is that, when we start recognizing racism as more institutional, as producing the way we see the world, um it brings it to a point where it's a few bigots to something we unknowingly become a part of. How does that effect how you see yourself as a teacher?*

*Betty: I think for me, it gets, I'm questioning what I'm doing all the time I mean when I'm teaching certain units over and over again I'm always thinking, rethinking about the way I posed a question, the response I gave after my students gave responses and I'm constantly gauging that all the time... So I find that for me that in terms of a teaching aspect I'm constantly kind of questioning and examining how do I do things and not necessarily always making them better, just trying to I guess... Just gets me looking at it all over again. Thinking, what do I need to do? And I think it makes it hard. It makes it really hard... If you don't acknowledge something you can't ever change it and I think that's the part that I find unfortunate is that even for myself, when I don't feel courageous enough to say something or do something...*

Both Betty and Veronica state that anti-racist principles have them questioning themselves at all times - their own values, their own preconceived notions and how this is affecting the decisions they are making within the school, in their classrooms, and with individual students on a daily basis. This is the goal and purpose of anti-racist anti-oppressive education; to understand, analyze and critique our own identity constructions which influence the way we see ourselves and the way we view the world. Without this deconstruction, imagining and creating inclusive centers for learning will be impossible; we will continue to recreate whiteness as the center unless we begin to see how it is reconstituted and reflected in ourselves. Turning the gaze away from the Other and fixing

it on ourselves is the key to developing anti-racist anti-oppressive education in our school systems.

## **CHAPTER SIX:**

### **Conclusions and Implications**

*“Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced”.* James Baldwin (1988)

This final chapter will begin by suggesting that the contemporary research on white identity construction is valuable for understanding the racial issues that pervade our school systems in Canada today. While this chapter also refers to the numerous barriers that anti-racist educators face, the most insidious of these barriers is our inability as white educators to acknowledge racism as a problem. White teachers are invested in identities that are produced as ‘objective’ and ‘good’, positioning us outside of racist social structures, and the implications of these constructions are clear. Policies and practices that maintain white supremacy are not viewed as race based, but are produced as ‘neutral’, and are therefore invisible to white people. The majority of the research on whiteness reveals that deconstructing whiteness and creating racial consciousness in white teachers is essential to the process of building inclusive schools.

In the final section of this conclusion, I will discuss my own attempt to resist whiteness as a white teacher, and reveal my hope that we as educators will embrace anti-

racist anti-oppressive education as part of our professional practice, and out of a desire to create social justice in our schools.

### ***Implications of Anti-racist Education***

This study illustrates one of the fundamental tenets of poststructuralism: that as human subjects, we are not autonomous, unified wholes, separate and distinct from discourses which regulate social activity, but are constituted in discourses as we take up positions in different ways . In other words, teachers are identified and identify themselves according to the positions they occupy within socially constructed discourses.

As many anti-racist educators have noted, white teacher identities are clearly defined as an effect of white middle-class values that can be diffused into the mainstream. Our freedom as teachers is denied in the sense that our identities and belief systems are often predetermined, as we are products of the normalizing forces which operate as the dominant discourses within our society. If we are given the opportunity to reflect on who we are, what we believe and how we came to be that way, as educators we can become active participants in our own formation as self-determining agents. As Infinito (2003) states;

I do not wish to defend our lack of knowledge or caring about racial issues, merely to point out that in order for us to change, to move toward solidarity with others, *we must be given the opportunity to adjust our way of thinking and being in the world.* Awareness and information are necessary but insufficient to bring about significant change in individuals. However, involvement in forming oneself as an ethical being is more than a willingness to change, it is a disposition toward and constant activity of changing our need to learn, to liberate ourselves from imposed and unreflective being (p.71).



This suggests that the ability to imagine a society reorganized without racial privilege requires a fundamental shift in the way we as white people think about our identities, and question our conceptions of the Other. Analyzing how colonial processes and practices continue to shape us, and how this affects what is happening in schools is clearly an essential component towards building inclusive classrooms. As educators, our racist belief systems cannot be addressed as individual acts of prejudice, with regard to racism individuals are rooted in and constructed by racialization processes. This research explores the ways in which educators are part of a larger structure (Britzman, 2000). We as teachers must view ourselves as an effect of larger systems. While we are not responsible for creating these systems we are accountable for reproducing them (Schick, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c; Willinsky, 1998). As Canadians, we all live with the legacy of a colonial past, and we are all accountable for what happens today. For these reasons, white teachers must begin to acknowledge the problem of racism.

The current research on whiteness suggests that in order to create social justice, the processes and the power of whiteness must be deconstructed. As stated previously, the national discourses which construct race, class, gender, and other subjectivities influence the way in which we see ourselves and inform our world view. These constructions are problematic in that they are historically grounded in white supremacist notions of superiority, superimposing a center or a 'norm' for which everything else is deemed inferior. This 'norm' as described by Fellows & Razack (1998) produces our innocence: "To be unmarked or unnamed is also simply to *embody* the norm and not to have actively produced and sustained it. To be the norm, yet to have the norm unnamed, *is to be innocent of the domination of others*" (p.341, emphasis added).

As our focus group participants noted, teachers are held up as being ‘moral’, ‘objective’, and of course ‘good’. As educators, these constructions limit our ability to adequately analyze and critique the current system of education of which we are an integral part, leading us instead to pathologize our students and the communities from which they come, thereby ignoring current inequities in the system (Brandon, 2003). These subjectivities keep us from understanding our role in the multiple oppressions which exist in our school systems, and deter us from creating inclusive school climates. As Gillborn (2006) suggests, simply talking about anti-racist education means nothing if practices such as dominant systems of testing, curriculum development, and teacher education programs are left unchanged.

### ***Barriers to Anti-Racist Education***

One of the most recent widespread studies done on racism in education took place in the United Kingdom in 2003 (Gillborn, 2006). The data gathered by the Commission for Racial Equality indicated that in a survey of over 3,000 public authorities, schools were the least likely to reply. While there may be many reasons for the lack of response, the detailed responses that were returned pointed to a disturbing trend. Not only did educators appear skeptical about the value of race equity work, teachers were the least likely to express a need for any further guidance on the issue of race. “Put simply, early indications suggest that many schools are inactive on race equality: at best they are too busy; at worst, they appear to be complacent about their duties and uninterested in further progress” (Gillborn, 2006, p. 17). As Gillborn’s (2006) research suggests, these findings

do not indicate that anti-racism has failed, but that in most schools it has simply not been tried.

While much of the research on racism in schools suggests that anti-racist anti-oppressive education is essential for transforming educational institutions, there are numerous barriers to building authentic anti-racist anti-oppressive education within our schools. According to research, the most pervasive barrier lies in the inability of individual white teachers to acknowledge their role in the construction and domination of the Other (Gaine, 2000; Hytten & Warren, 2003; Lewis, 2001; McIntyre, 1997; Raby, 2004; Schick, 2000a). Feelings of guilt and denial often contribute to a lack of '*seeing*' or understanding the ways in which race, class and gender have come to matter in our classrooms today (Bowker, 1993; Hytten & Warren, 2003; Lewis, 2001; Olsson, 1996; Schick, 2000a). While structural and institutional changes are clearly necessary, these changes will only come about by building consciousness in individual teachers working within the system.

Much of the research testifies to the fact that no real change can happen in schools unless teachers can internalize it (Carr & Klassen, 1997; Kailin, 1999, 2002; Lewis, 2001; McIntyre, 1997; Raby, 2004; Schick, 2000a; Sleeter, 1993). Changes do not happen without teachers, and teachers do not institute change unless they understand and believe in it. Teachers must engage in anti-racist theory in order to question the racial and cultural assumptions they share with many others in the society. These assumptions create our common sense notions, which means challenging these notions can be a difficult process. This means that creating anti-racist education in a school setting can

take time, and may face various forms of resistance (Gaine, 2000; Hytten & Warren, 2003; Raby, 2004; St. Denis & Schick, 2003).

The point of anti-racist educational work is to challenge white supremacy and create a more inclusive school climate, but racism has been found to be resilient. Part of this resiliency lies in its ability to operate at different levels (Gaine, 2000; Razack, 2001). Just as one level is starting to open up, another level may be shutting down. There is a great deal of interconnectedness that needs to be addressed, and for this reason there must be structured time for staff to come together to reflect on beliefs and curriculum development goals (Gaine, 2000). The time and structural support needed for teachers to embark on their own journeys into uncovering barriers based on race and perpetuated through our current practices are of crucial importance. In the current socio-political climate where economic decisions often determine the nature of our education systems, teachers must struggle to achieve a more progressive and just education. Teachers, administrators, parents, and students can create change by analyzing status quo practices, engaging in critical dialogue, and creating solutions through a collaborative effort. The power of liberatory practices, despite the barriers, can have a profound effect on both teachers and students (Bishop, 2002; Lea & Helfand, 2004).

The racism that permeates our school systems can be disrupted when educators consistently problematise racism in learning materials, curriculum, and our conceptions of what constitutes knowledge (Gaine, 2000; Kumashiro, 2004). This is the target for anti-racism. For this to happen, teachers have to change at the personal level, as individual teachers must embrace anti-racism in order to change curriculum and school climate (Kailin, 1999, 2002; McIntosh, 1998; McIntyre, 1997; Raby, 2004; Sleeter,

1993). Gaine (2000) has suggested that anti-racism among a predominantly white staff is an ideological struggle against the media and dominant liberal discourses, jokes, unchallenged assumptions and a history of established beliefs and practices. While these changes would constantly be under threat unless there were changes at the institutional and structural levels also, the change must begin by creating consciousness in individual teachers (Bishop, 2002).

It is difficult to know with certainty the impact that anti-racist education can have on the staff and student body of each school system, but once teachers have learned anti-racist consciousness, it cannot be unlearned (Essed, 2004). While there is no panacea for the challenges raised by this research, it is essential that we as white teachers begin turning the gaze by understanding our own racial identities in hopes that such an examination will disrupt racist educational practices and contribute to new ways of teaching and learning. Much like Paulo Freire (1970) outlined in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, education must entail “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (p.19). Although the focus of Freire’s educational philosophy was to create consciousness in the oppressed, his framework is valuable for our understanding of how the individual/collective consciousness of the oppressor can be transformed. As educators, we must become active participants in examining our own realities, in order for us to understand how the production of our realities impacts on our students. This research has put the focus on creating consciousness in the oppressor rather than the oppressed, in hopes that educators can build inclusive school climates where racism is no longer silenced and white privilege is continually challenged (McIntyre, 1997).

As teachers, we must become committed to educational change. The inequities perpetuated by the curriculum, school culture, and our own perceptions must be challenged (Carr & Klassen, 1997). The environment we build for this kind of critical education should be deeply challenging and at the same time, supportive and encouraging (Hytten & Warren, 2003). In the end, as educators we must all begin to carefully rethink our own assumptions about why race matters. We must always be cognizant of the ways in which social and historical processes affect us, and as a consequence, continually question what we are doing and why we are doing it. In this way we can begin the work of restructuring our education system.

### ***Resisting Whiteness***

The research studies which have focused on the production of white teacher identity by authors such as St. Denis & Schick (2003), Fellows & Razack(1998), Sleeter (1993), McIntyre (1997), Kailin (1999, 2002), and numerous others, have allowed me to consider my own identity construction. Poststructuralists view identity as multiple and shifting: each one of us constantly negotiates different subject positions (Burr, 1995; Weedon, 1997). As a white, middle-class, heterosexual woman I may experience gender as a form of oppression, yet my class, race and education level locate me as part of the dominant group (Hurtado & Stewart, 1997; Norquay, 1993). I am only now beginning to see the irony of the ways in which I willingly ascertain power from being part of the dominant group on the one hand, while desperately trying to disassociate from it on the other. In his chapter entitled “The matter of whiteness”, Dyer (1997) reveals that there is something especially white in this non-located and disembodied position that I continue to gravitate

towards. Those like me who occupy positions of cultural hegemony carry on as if we are neutral and unsituated; that we are simply human, not raced. This is one of our most powerful cultural myths – that we as whites are just people, while the production of the Other defines *race* (hooks; 1992; Morrison; 1992; Said, 1985). In fact, it is the very power of being white in this white supremacist context that allows me to work in anti-racist education without fear of repercussions. As short sighted as I feel our education systems can be when it comes to issues of oppression, I have thus far received nothing but support from the administration. I carry a ‘passport’ of sorts in an education system where white supremacy reigns, and I know that my colleagues of color rarely experience the same support (St. Denis & Hampton, 2002; Thomas, 1992). As a white person I must resolve to challenge dominance wherever and whenever I see it happening – yet as a white person, there are numerous things that will remain invisible to me. As individuals, we do not see things as they are, we see things as we are. While I have slowly built a racial consciousness that I did not have previously, it is impossible for me to observe anything that is not tainted by the lens through which I see. And so I have my own partial ‘truth’, or partial perspective (Hill Collins, 1990; Kumashiro, 2004) regarding the things that I have researched, read, seen, heard and experienced about race, and I can speak only to those.

My attempt to understand the identity construction of white teachers such as myself is at best problematic (Britzman, 2000). I have resisted, and continue to resist positioning myself inside of whiteness using various strategies which include, attempting to aligning myself with people of color, disassociating myself from those whom I consider to be ‘racist whites’, clinging to identity constructions of ‘goodness’ and ‘innocence’, and

finally, in doing graduate work in anti-racist education. While I initially believed I chose this field in order to support the many students I have taught over the years, I have come to the realization that I was drawn to anti-racist education in hopes of further erasing my own whiteness. When I was gently and compassionately persuaded to problematize my alignment with people of color, reposition myself among racist whites, and question my own identity construction of goodness, I thought about quitting – not once, but twice. In the end, it is my students, along with the friends and colleagues that I have come to work with who keep me here.

In having tried to deconstruct white teacher identity, I have realized that in many respects our role mirrors that of the federal government, the justice system, and many of the other institutions which create and maintain colonial rule. I have observed over the years that white teachers, much like our governing body, tend to rely on two contradictory positions regarding Aboriginal education; one of crushing authoritative power, and the other of benevolent paternalistic ‘caretaker’. These discourses influence and shape what has come to be known as the ‘hidden curriculum’ in schools, and determines how we as white teachers treat Aboriginal youth in our class rooms. I believe that Aboriginal youth are heavily targeted in schools for streaming, disciplining, and suspension as a continuation of the ways in which whiteness is achieved through dominance ( Bowker, 1993; Ledlow, 1992; Schick, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c; St. Denis & Hampton, 2002) . Much like Sherene Razack (2005) stated in her lecture entitled, “Bootprints on the chest: Racial violence and white settler society”, there is an ongoing imperative that we as whites must ‘clear the land’ of Aboriginal peoples in order to justify our presence here. While Razack theorizes how this imperative is enacted within



our justice system, when I envision the overwhelming number of Aboriginal youth who are being forced out of our classrooms, our hallways, and our schools, this metaphor of a white justice system engaged in the process of clearing the land becomes an ugly analogy for what is happening to Aboriginal youth in our school systems.

As teachers, we are invested in discourses which produce essentialized notions of the Other that in turn construct our identities of ‘goodness’ and respectability (Kailin, 1999, 2002; McIntyre, 1997; Schick, 2000a, 2000c; Sleeter, 1993). As an educator, I often found myself supporting rhetoric regarding Aboriginal education that was completely contradictory, yet such is the nature of liberalism that most of us have become immune to discourse that is rife with contradiction. As educators, we are invested in cultural deficiency and cultural determinism as explanations for the current gap in completion rates between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. As St. Denis (2004) suggests, when racism is recast as a problem of cultural difference, the solutions take on particular forms that serve to obscure the systemic and structural relations of racial domination. Yet ironically, the key to the success of anti-racist education rests, in large part, in the hands of white teachers (Carr & Klassen, 1997).

So where does this leave us as white educators? “The very status of anti-racism means that those of us who want to confront and challenge racism in ourselves, in institutions, and in others, can never forget race and racism, but also cannot be trapped by it; we cannot allow it to be reified as meaningful in the particular ways we have learned to understand it” (Thompson, 2003, p.24). While it is clear that there must be multiple sites of struggle, I believe education to be a key site for resistance and transformation, but change will not occur without building critical race consciousness in teachers. As we

come to recognize how we are produced, we can begin to claim the agency to resist and redefine what it means to be a teacher. As Philomena Essed (2004) states “One cannot undo critical knowledge. There is no way not to recognize racial and other injustices once you have learned how to see them” (p.132). In spite of my awareness of the structural and systemic issues that we face, I am optimistic and hopeful regarding anti-racist education. Why, you may ask? Because I know that I am *not* special - teachers who care about young people and who want to resist dominance and oppression are plentiful, but like me, they need to be given the critical knowledge to counter the discourses that produce our current situation. “One can only hope that this critical knowledge be used fearlessly, but with wisdom – with respect for one another as human beings” (Essed, 2004, p. 132).

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**APPENDIX A**  
**Application for Approval of Research Protocol**



## **Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB)**

### **APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROTOCOL**

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#### ***Information Required:***

1. **Researchers:** Sheelah McLean, Indian and Northern Education Program  
Tyler McCreary, Department of Geography  
  
**Supervisors:** Dr. Verna St. Denis, Department of Educational Foundations  
Dr. Evelyn Peters, Department of Geography

- 1a. **Students:** Sheelah McLean (M. Ed.)  
Tyler McCreary (M. A.)
- 1b. **Anticipated start date of the research study:** February 5, 2006  
**Expected completion date of the study:** October 20, 2006

2. **Title:** High School Teachers' Perceptions of Racism.

3. **Abstract**

In this study we will explore how teachers describe racism in their schools. We will administer an open-ended questionnaire to high school teachers within the Saskatoon Public School Board. In the survey, teachers will be asked to provide examples of incidents of racism in their schools and how they responded to these incidents. The survey results will be analysed and coded according to major themes. These results will be brought back to the staff in a focus group format to share the results and further develop key insights. Teachers play a pivotal role in race relations in education and it is critical to consider how they perceive the problem of racism in their schools. Their perceptions may influence decisions about how to interpret and respond to racial inequality.

4. **Funding**

None.

5. **Expertise**

Associate Professor in Educational Foundations, Dr. Verna St. Denis is a Cree and Metis woman from Beatty's and Okemasis First Nation. Her research and teaching has focused on anti-racist, anti-oppressive education with pre-service and in-service teachers.

Associate Professor and Canada Research Chair in Geography, Dr. Evelyn Peters is an

urban social geographer by trade. Her research has focused on the urbanization of Aboriginal peoples.

M.Ed. Candidate, Sheelah McLean has taught high school in the Public school system for 14 years, developing programming and curriculum for marginalized youth. Sheelah has also worked for the Office of the Treaty Commissioner researching and publishing *Teaching Treaties in the Classroom*. M.A. Candidate, Tyler McCreary has received a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council scholarship to support his work examining whiteness and race in the Canadian prairies. He also organized a three-day conference on Treaties in 2004.

6. **Conflict of Interest**

None.

7. **Participants**

Participants will be high school teachers from the Saskatoon Public High Schools. Two of the eight public high schools shall be selected to participate. To sample from the diversity of schools in the city, one eastside school and one westside school will be selected. School involvement will be arranged through the Professional Development Committees, which will invite all teachers within the school to participate. The researchers will know participants to be high school teachers, but no other criteria will be necessary. The researchers will not seek additional information regarding the participants from school administrators or the Professional Development Committees.

- 7a. Recruitment will be done through formal school channels, such as Professional Development Committees. This will involve meetings and discussion but no posters or advertisements shall be required. A sample letter inviting the schools to participate is attached.

8. **Consent**

An invitation will be extended to high schools from the Saskatoon Public School System to participate in this study as part of their professional development towards building inclusive school culture and climate. Each staff member from the schools choosing to participate will be given consent forms regarding their participation in the survey and focus group session. Anonymity of survey and focus group responses shall be guaranteed. As the participants are professionals, they can understand consent forms written for an educated audience. Their professional status also means they are not a vulnerable group. All teachers will be invited to participate in the surveys and focus group session. The group size and setting allow for discussion of topics in an open professional environment. This space acts as a public forum among staff members, who frequently analyze and discuss issues that affect their teaching practice in this manner. The researchers will undertake to safeguard the confidentiality of the discussion, but cannot guarantee that other members of the groups will do so. Researchers will provide letters of information to the focus group members recognizing the nature of these focus groups. The researchers

will further insure strict anonymity for all participants and the schools in reporting the research results. Contributions will remain confidential and anonymous and will be protected through the use of pseudonyms. Any personal identifying information and/or direct words that may compromise participant identification will be altered to protect the participant's identity.

9. **Methods/Procedures**

Surveys and consent forms will be distributed to the staff members during a staff meeting. Researchers will outline the consent forms and survey questions, answering any questions that participants may have. Then within the staff meeting, teachers will be provided with a half hour to fill-out the survey. Researchers will collect the survey responses at the end of the meeting.

The focus groups will begin with a discussion of the research protocol and the researchers will distribute and discuss the consent forms. Then focus groups will be given data results, and participants will be invited to respond. The focus group discussion will be loosely structured around dominant themes emerging from the analysis of survey responses. These focus group discussions will be recorded using audio equipment. These recordings will be transcribed, and the transcripts used for analysis. No record of the names of participants shall be maintained, and speakers will be identified in numerical form.

An invitation will be extended for the researchers to present a final report of the research from the survey and the focus groups. Research results published either in the form of a thesis or academic journal publication will be made available to the school.

10. **Storage of Data**

The data will be stored in a cabinet in Dr. Peters locked office (Room 251, Arts Building) for a period of five years. There will be no personal identifying information, other than a reference code to a list kept in a separate locked location, on group workshop tapes, survey responses and transcripts.

11. **Dissemination of Results**

The research will be used as data for Sheelah Mclean's and Tyler McCreary's Masters theses. Additionally, the researchers shall seek to disseminate results to the broader academic community through journal articles and conference presentations.

12. **Risk, Benefits, and Deception**

The purpose of professional development within schools is to allow teachers to reflect on their own epistemology and pedagogy. Teachers play a pivotal role in race relations in education and it is critical to consider how they perceive the problem of racism in their schools. Their perceptions may influence decisions about how to interpret and respond to racial inequality. This research may offer an opportunity for educators to explore ways in

which race plays out in the classroom, and facilitate a heightened awareness of racial issues.

While audio tape will be used during the focus group portion of the research program, participants will be aware that they are being recorded and anonymity will be guaranteed.

13. **Confidentiality**

The identities of all participants in the research will remain confidential and no identifying information (e.g., specific names and locales of schools, or staff) will be revealed in the reporting of the research or data. In the event that focus group participants volunteer identifying information, or data provided by the schools reveal identifying information, such information will be destroyed once data collection is complete, or masked (if the data are in narrative form) to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

14. **Data/Transcript Release**

While the participants will be given the results of the data collected in the surveys, anonymity of participants will not be compromised. Any quotations used in the reporting of the research results will contain no information that would identify the participant. Due to the size and nature of the focus groups, it will not be possible to allow for transcript review by participants. No record of participant names from the surveys and the focus group sessions will be maintained.

15. **Debriefing and feedback**

The results from the survey will be disseminated through the focus group. An invitation will be extended to the schools to present the final report of the research from the survey and the focus groups. The researchers will provide contact information to all participants for any follow up questions or discussions. Also, the research results will be published in the form of graduate student theses and made available to the schools.

16. **Required Signatures**

Sheelah Mclean, M. Ed. Candidate, Indian and Northern Education Program

Tyler McCreary, M. A. candidate, Department of Geography

Dr. Verna St. Denis, Associate Professor, Department of Educational Foundations

Dr. Evelyn Peters, Associate Professor, Department of Geography

Dr. Reg Wickett, Head, Department of Educational Foundations

Dr. O. W. Archibald, Head, Department of Geography

**17. Contact Name and Information**

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**APPENDIX B**  
**Certificate of Approval**



## Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR  
Verna St. Denis

DEPARTMENT  
Educational Foundations - Indian and  
Northern Education Program - Adult and  
Continuing Education

BEH#  
Beh 06-06

STUDENT RESEARCHER(S)  
Sheelah McLean; Tyler McCreary

INSTITUTION (S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT

University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon SK

SUB-INVESTIGATOR(S)  
Evelyn Peters

SPONSORING AGENCIES  
UNFUNDED

TITLE  
High School Teachers' Perceptions of Racism

CURRENT APPROVAL DATE  
24-Feb-2006

CURRENT RENEWAL DATE  
01-Feb-2007

### CERTIFICATION

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

### ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

The term of this approval is five years. However, the approval must be renewed on an annual basis. In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion. Please refer to the following website for further instructions:

<http://www.usask.ca/research/ethical.shtml>

APPROVED.

Valerie Thompson, Chair  
Behavioural Research Ethics Board  
University of Saskatchewan

Please send all correspondence to:

Ethics Office  
University of Saskatchewan  
Room 306, Kirk Hall, 117 Science Place  
Saskatoon, SK S7N 5C8  
Phone: (306) 966-2084 Fax: (306) 966-2069



## **Certificate of Approval**

### **Study Revisions**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR  
Verna St. Denis

DEPARTMENT  
Educational Foundations - Indian and  
Northern Education Program - Adult and  
Continuing Education

BEH#  
06-06

STUDENT RESEARCHER(S)  
Sheelah McLean; Tyler McCreary

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CONDUCTED (STUDY SITE)

University of Saskatchewan

Saskatoon SK

SUB-INVESTIGATOR(S)

Evelyn Peters

SPONSOR  
UNFUNDED

TITLE  
High School Teachers' Perceptions of Racism

CURRENT APPROVAL DATE  
24-Feb-2006

CURRENT RENEWAL DATE  
01-Feb-2007

CERTIFICATION UPDATE  
Recruitment Letter

APPROVED ON  
10-Apr-2006

#### **CERTIFICATION**

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the proposed revisions to your study. The revisions were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds.

The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

#### **ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS**

The term of this approval is five years, but the approval must be renewed on an annual basis. In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion. Please refer to the following website for further instructions:

<http://www.usask.ca/research/ethical.shtml>

APPROVED.

Please send all correspondence to:

Ethics Office  
University of Saskatchewan  
Room 306, Kirk Hall, 117 Science Place  
Saskatoon, SK S7N 5C8  
Phone: (306) 966-2084 Fax: (306) 966-2069

**APPENDIX C**  
**Letter of Participant Consent**



## High School Teachers' Perceptions of Racism

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM SURVEY PARTICIPATION

You are invited to participate in a study entitled High School Teachers' Perceptions of Racism in their Schools. Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask questions you might have.

#### Researchers:

Dr. Evelyn Peters  
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Sheelah McLean  
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(306) 651-2366

**Purpose and Procedure:** This study will explore how teachers describe racism in their schools. Data will be collected from an open-ended survey conducted at a staff meeting and a follow-up focus group discussion occurring during a professional development day the following month. The survey will ask teachers to provide examples of racism in their schools and how they responded. These survey results will be analyzed and coded according to major themes, and these results brought back to the staff to share the results and further develop key insights in a focus group setting during a professional development session. The survey will take approximately 30 minutes.

Participation in this research is voluntary. No-one shall be expected to participate in the survey unless that is their individual choice. Choosing not to participate will not affect the participants' professional status.

**Potential Risks:** The issue of racism can be troubling for some individuals. Researchers will make themselves available for further discussion of issues raised.

**Potential Benefits:** The purpose of professional development within schools is to allow teachers to explore ways in which race plays out in the classroom. Teachers play a pivotal role in race relations in education and it is critical to consider how they perceive the problem of racism in their schools. Their perceptions may influence decisions about how to interpret and respond to racial inequality. This research can facilitate deeper reflections among educators of the ways in

which race plays out in the classroom, and how their pedagogy can be improved through a heightened awareness of racial issues.

**Storage of Data:** The data will be stored in a cabinet in Dr. Peters locked office (Room 251, Arts Building) for a period of five years. The transcripts and surveys will not contain identification of individuals or schools. Identification information will be stored on a reference code list kept in a separate locked location.

**Confidentiality:** This data will be used for the completion of two Masters Theses, and reported to academic audiences through conference presentations and journal publications. Survey data will also be aggregated to analyze prevalence of certain themes. Direct quotations may be used from the data collected to highlight particular themes and how ideas were elaborated; however, no identifying information will be included regarding the individual, school, or city. The researchers will undertake to safeguard the confidentiality of the participant responses. You understand that your contributions will remain confidential and anonymous and will be protected through the use of pseudonyms. You understand and expect that any personal identifying information and/or direct words that may compromise your identification will be altered to protect your identity.

**Right to Withdraw:** Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time, without penalty of any sort. Choosing to withdraw will not impact your professional status or recognition of your attendance of the professional development exercise. You understand that you are not obliged to continue participation beyond this survey, even though a follow-up focus group session will result from the survey component of this study.

**Questions:** If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact the researchers at the numbers provided above if you have questions at a later time. This study has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on (insert date). Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (966-2084). Out of town participants may call collect. Research results published either in the form of a thesis or academic journal publication will be made available to the school.

**Consent to Participate:** I have read and understood the description provided above; I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I consent to participate in the study described above, understanding that I may withdraw this consent at any time. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Name of Participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Researcher)

**APPENDIX D**  
**Focus Group Consent Form**



## High School Teachers' Perceptions of Racism

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPATION

You are invited to participate in a study entitled High School Teachers' Perceptions of Racism in their Schools. Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask questions you might have.

#### Researchers:

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**Purpose and Procedure:** This study will explore how teachers describe racism in their schools. Data will be collected from an open-ended survey conducted at a staff meeting and a follow-up focus group discussion occurring during a professional development day the following month. The survey will ask teachers to provide examples of racism in their schools and how they responded. These survey results will be analyzed and coded according to major themes, and these results brought back to the staff to share the results and further develop key insights in a focus group setting during a professional development session. An audio recording of this session will be made and transcribed as research data. The focus group session will occupy either the morning or afternoon half of a professional development day.

Participation in this research is voluntary. No-one shall be expected to participate in the focus group discussion unless that is their individual choice. Choosing not to participate will not affect the participants' professional status.

**Potential Risks:** The issue of racism can be troubling for some individuals. The researchers will take this into account during the focus group session. Researchers will make themselves available for further discussion of issues raised.

**Potential Benefits:** The purpose of professional development within schools is to allow teachers to explore ways in which race plays out in the classroom. Teachers play a pivotal role in race relations in education and it is critical to consider how they perceive the problem of racism in



their schools. Their perceptions may influence decisions about how to interpret and respond to racial inequality. This research can facilitate deeper reflections among educators of the ways in which race plays out in the classroom, and how their pedagogy can be improved through a heightened awareness of racial issues.

**Storage of Data:** The data will be stored in a cabinet in Dr. Peters locked office (Room 251, Arts Building) for a period of five years. The transcripts and surveys will not contain identification of individuals or schools. Identification information will be stored on a reference code list kept in a separate locked location.

**Confidentiality:** This data will be used for the completion of two Masters Theses, and reported to academic audiences through conference presentations and journal publications. Direct quotations may be used from the data collected to highlight particular themes and how ideas were elaborated; however, no identifying information will be included regarding the individual, school, or city. The researchers will undertake to safeguard the confidentiality of the discussion, but cannot guarantee that other members of the groups will do so. Please respect the confidentiality of the other members of the group by not disclosing the contents of this discussion outside the group, and be aware that others may not respect your confidentiality. You understand that your contributions will remain confidential and anonymous and will be protected through the use of pseudonyms. You understand and expect that any personal identifying information and/or direct words that may compromise your identification will be altered to protect your identity.

**Right to Withdraw:** Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time, without penalty of any sort. Choosing to withdraw will not impact your professional status or recognition of your attendance of the professional development exercise.

**Questions:** If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact the researchers at the numbers provided above if you have questions at a later time. This study has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on (insert date). Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (966-2084). Out of town participants may call collect. Research results published either in the form of a thesis or academic journal publication will be made available to the school.

**Consent to Participate:** I have read and understood the description provided above; I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I consent to participate in the study described above, understanding that I may withdraw this consent at any time. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Name of Participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Researcher)

## **APPENDIX E**

### **Questionnaire**

#### High School Teachers Perceptions of Racism Questionnaire

Please respond in paragraph format, multiple responses may be given.

1. Describe in as much detail as possible any examples or incidents that you think indicate racism or racial insensitivity (whether or not you believe such incidents were intentional or unintentional) that you have witnessed, heard about, or experienced in your work in school(s).
2. What were your thoughts about the particular incident(s)?
3. Describe how you responded to the incident(s).

## **APPENDIX F**

### **Initial Focus Group Questions**

1. How do the survey results, presented on March 16<sup>th</sup>, reflect the situation in today's classroom/school?
2. How does anti-racist anti-oppressive education fit into today's classroom/school?
3. How could anti-racist anti-oppressive education expand in the future?

